

Celebrating 150 Years

**The YMCA of
Greater Boston
1851-2001**

Julia Heskell



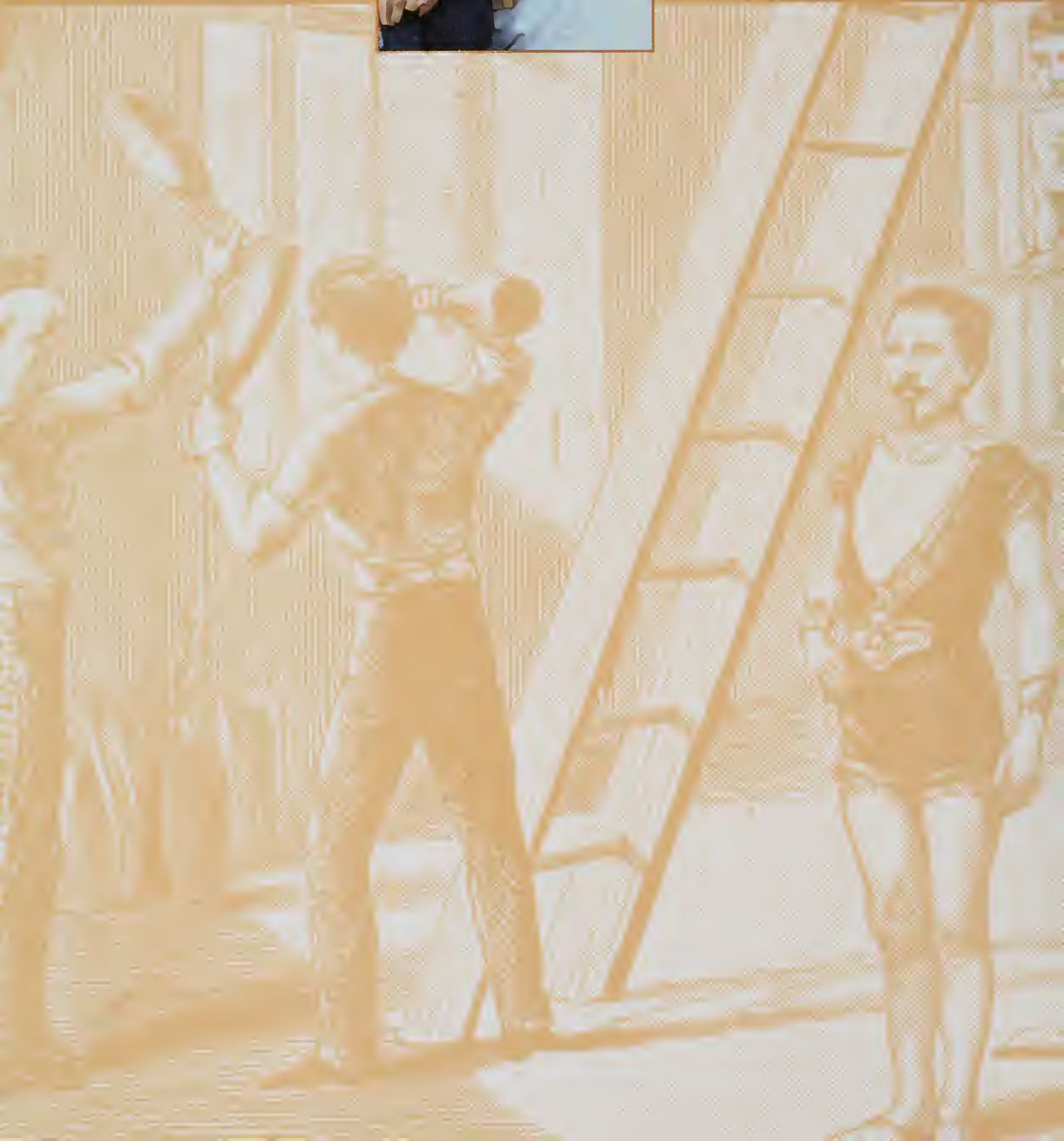
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1851-2001





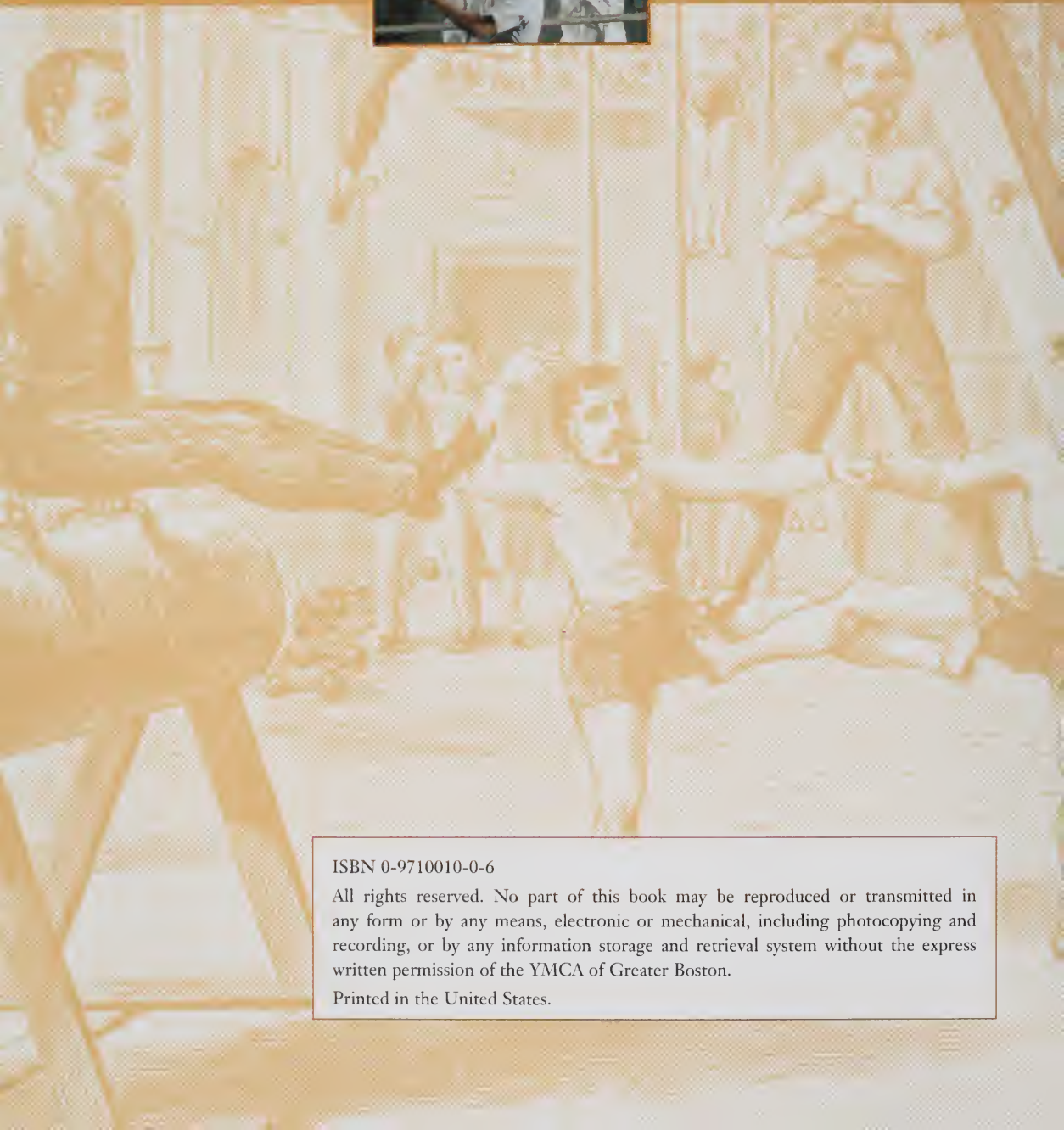


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ISBN 0-9710010-0-6

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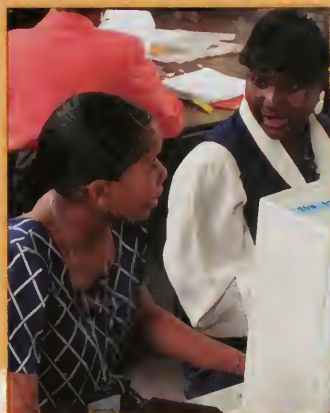


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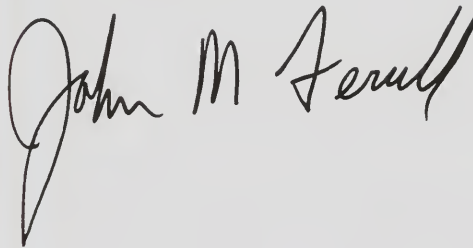
Foreword

The pages that follow tell the 150-year history of the YMCA of Greater Boston—America's first YMCA.

From its humble origins as an evangelical association dedicated to improving the spiritual and mental condition of young men, to its current, secular mission of improving the quality of life for all, the YMCA has been firmly grounded in the core values that have guided and sustained its staff and volunteer leadership through the years.

The Y's genius has been to anticipate and respond to the major societal issues of each era. In meeting the challenges of each passing decade, the YMCA has always upheld its mission of building health of spirit, mind, and body for all.

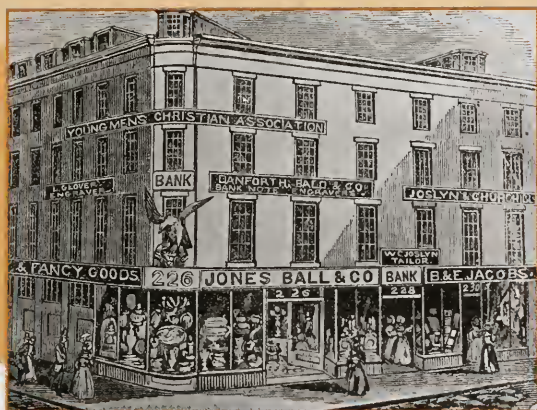
Celebrating our illustrious history as prologue, we look forward to a bright future!



John M. Ferrell,
President
May 2001



YMCA of
Greater Boston
® *Keeping Families Strong*



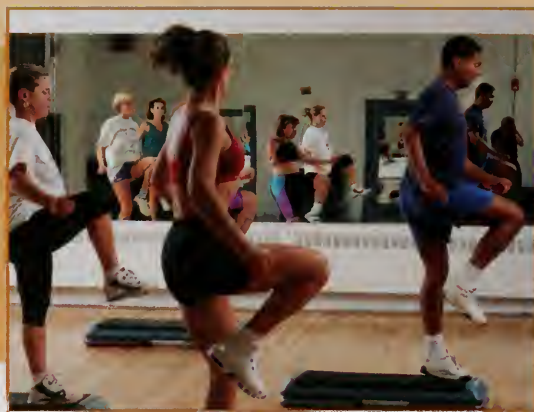
Introduction

In 2001, the YMCA of Greater Boston marks the 150th anniversary of its founding by Thomas Valentine Sullivan. The Y is one of the oldest continuously functioning social service organizations in the country, but it is anything but old. Its energy and sense of purpose are more vibrant today than at any time in the past. A map tells the story: the small religious society that got its start above a storefront in downtown Boston now thrives as a major social service organization in branches and program centers in many parts of the city and numerous suburbs besides. This book explains how it all happened, from the modest beginnings in 1851 to the major presence in metropolitan Boston that the Y is today.

The book explores several major themes that recur consistently throughout the YMCA's history. First is the Y's relationship with the community around it, the city of Boston. From its earliest days, the Association has depended on and benefited from the contributions of both time and money bestowed by the leaders and members of the community.

This leads to the second major theme of the book: the Y's remarkable expansion over time. As the city of Boston expanded geographically, so did the Y, forming new branches, facilities, and program centers wherever needed. Membership also expanded—from 600 members in its first year to more than 60,000 in its 150th. Key to this expansion has been the Y's inclusive attitude. In the early days, this meant young Christian males. As the decades passed, the Y opened its doors to men and women of different ages, religions, ethnic backgrounds, national origins, and races. Indeed, the Y was one

The YMCA's first location, 1852, and the Oak Square Branch, completed in 2001



Physical fitness in the
1870s and 2001

of the first truly voluntarily diverse organizations in the country—embracing multiculturalism long before the term was invented.

Third, there is the YMCA's extraordinary adaptability. Attuned to the changing needs of its constituencies, the Association has consistently updated proven programs and developed new ones to meet those needs. This truth was evident in the 1850s, when the Y provided resources to further education and employment opportunities for young immigrants. It was just as evident during the 1930s, when the Y helped great numbers of unemployed find work. And it is no less evident in the new millennium.

Although the Y has readily adapted to change in the society it serves, it has never lost sight of the values espoused since its earliest days—the importance of spirit, mind, and body. An evangelical society at the time of its founding, the YMCA provided religious support with the aim of building Christian character. Over time, the Y developed a more broadly Christian outlook, seeking to help its members become good citizens. As the Association became an increasingly secular organization in the final decades of the twentieth century, “spirit” came to stand for general Judeo-Christian principles.

Devoted to the furthering of the mind, the Y has always made education one of its top priorities. From classes on “Intellectual Improvement” to the Evening Institute—the forerunner of Northeastern University—to training in computers and business, the Association has consistently provided programs of value to its constituents.

Physical fitness, too, is a concept that dates back to the Y's early days, originating with Robert Jeffries Roberts's invention



of the exercise program in the 1870s. Since that time, the Association has consistently promoted cardiovascular health, providing state-of-the-art facilities and access to health care to members throughout the greater metropolitan area.

If Thomas Sullivan could see the Y today, he would be astonished at all it has become. Although much has changed, one thing remains the same: in 2001, as in 1851, the YMCA of Greater Boston helps people lead better lives.

Y classes at the beginning and end of the twentieth century

1851–1879

1851

Boston Young Men's Christian Association is founded on December 29



Spring Lane Chapel,
Old South Church

1852

Boston YMCA opens at Washington and Summer Streets



1853

The Y moves to Tremont Temple

1857

First Christmas Fair

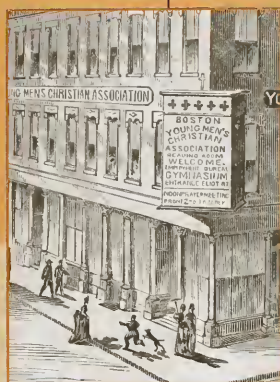


CHAPTER ONE

The First Generation, 1851–1879

1867

First branch
opens:
East Boston

**1872**

Boston YMCA
moves to
Gymnasium
Building

1873

Y holds
Bazaar of
Nations in
the spring



First aid lecture

1875

Y launches first
coordinated
education
program

1876

Y inaugurates first
physical education
program; appoints
Robert Jeffries
Roberts as
Superintendent

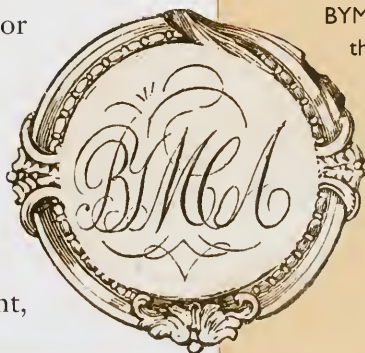


*Image of Roberts's
muscled back
used to
promote
the Y*

Momentous change prevailed in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century. Revolutions in transportation and communications—the development of paved highways, canals, and railroads, and the invention of the telegraph and new printing technologies—helped transform New England from an agricultural to an interregional industrial economy. As mass production gained momentum, the cities and towns of the region evolved from producers of colonial handicrafts to the country's leading manufacturers of books, textiles, shoes, furniture, and other products.

During this period, Boston grew rapidly as a commercial, financial, and manufacturing center.¹ Lured by new and exciting opportunities, young men in large numbers left their homes in the countryside or emigrated from Europe to try their luck in the big city. Between 1800 and 1850, the city's population rose sixfold, reaching nearly 140,000. In this era before streetcars, the new immigrants settled in populous neighborhoods in the center of town, near the harbor (today's Quincy Market, Waterfront, Financial District, and the North End).

Part of an 1857 logo
with the initials
BYMCA for
the Boston
Young Men's
Christian
Association



**Periodic
fluctuations in
the economy—
severe
depressions
and massive
unemployment—
exacerbated
already difficult
conditions, and
prompted a
religious
response, the
“Second Great
Awakening ...”**

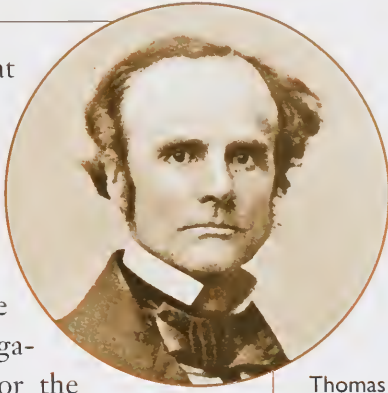
While Boston offered economic opportunities for the immigrant, it also harbored the problems common to urban life in this period: crowding, poverty, and poor working conditions. Periodic fluctuations in the economy—severe depressions and massive unemployment—exacerbated already difficult conditions, and prompted a religious response, the “Second Great Awakening,” a series of evangelical revivals that swept the country beginning in the 1820s. In New England, this religious fervor led to the founding of a number of different Christian institutions based on the Puritan notions of collective responsibility and the availability of redemption. Evangelical churches of different denominations—Congregational, Methodist, Baptist, and Episcopal—grew in number, while Bible societies, moral reform groups, and benevolent organizations of all kinds began.² One organization would have a far greater impact than all the rest: the Boston Young Men’s Christian Association. The story of this organization begins with the man who founded it, Thomas Valentine Sullivan.

Thomas Valentine Sullivan and the Founding of the Boston YMCA³

The grandson of an Irish immigrant, Thomas Sullivan was born in Boston’s North End in 1800. At the age of 19, he took up a sailor’s career and became a commander in his 20s. After enduring multiple shipwrecks and illnesses, Sullivan retired from his seafaring career and devoted his life to missionary work. In 1848, he established the Marine Mission at Large, an interdenominational seamen’s welfare organization in Boston. Sullivan practiced “social religion,” handing out pamphlets and preaching to sailors on the wharf, reaching men who probably would not have gone to church services.⁴ Convinced that intellectual stimulation was integral to a good Christian life, he also established a lending library. These two components—religious instruction and intellectual stimulation—would be integral to the Boston YMCA from its founding days onward.

Although Sullivan’s Marine Mission at Large proved a noteworthy addition to Boston social organizations, he was

destined to found an organization that would have a far greater impact on the life of that city. In the fall of 1851, Sullivan read an article in the *Christian Watchman and Reflector*, a Baptist weekly published in Boston. Written by George M. Van Derlip, the article described the Young Men's Christian Association, an organization founded in London in 1844 for the spiritual welfare of young men. The London YMCA's quarters housed a library and reading room, and its activities included prayer meetings and class instruction in a number of subjects. "Its religious character is its peculiar glory," Van Derlip wrote.



Thomas Valentine Sullivan

There are other associations which accomplish a part of what this proposes, but I know of none in which the attainment of vital piety and the manifestation of godliness is the leading object... Young men from the country come up to London, and many are at once led out of temptation. Instead of snares, they find friends who have provided a delightful place, and a delightful way to spend leisure hours. The young stranger can say no longer, "No man careth for my soul." ⁵

The description of the London Association resonated with Captain Sullivan, who was eager to reach a wider audience of young men. On December 15, 1851, he invited 32 men from 20 evangelical churches to a meeting at the Central Congregational Church. After the opening prayers, Sullivan proposed a new organization, "the special design of which should be to throw a kind protection of influence around young men coming from the country to the city."⁶ A committee was appointed to "prepare a plan of organization," to draft a constitution for the new group. A week later, Sullivan and his colleagues met at the Spring Lane Chapel of Old South Church to review the draft, and on December 29, they ratified the document. Thus the Boston YMCA came into being, one month after the founding of the Y of Montreal, the first Association in North America.

The constitution set out the mission of the new organization. "The founders of the new Society," read the preamble, had the

1848

Thomas Sullivan establishes the Marine Mission at Large, an inter-denominational seamen's welfare organization.



“strong desire for the promotion of Evangelical religion among the young men of this city.” They aimed to make it

*a social organization of those in whom the love of Christ has produced love to men; who shall meet the young stranger as he enters our city, take him by the hand, direct him to a board house where he may find a quiet home pervaded with Christian influences, introduce him to the Church and Sabbath School, bring him to the Rooms of the Association, and in every way throw around him good influences, so that he may feel that he is not a stranger, but that noble and Christian spirits care for his soul....The name of this Society shall be the Boston Young Men's Christian Association, and its object the improvement of the spiritual and mental condition of young men.*⁷

Based on the London Y's constitution, the document delineated the different kinds of membership available. Active members—any “young man who is a member in regular standing of an Evangelical Church”—had voting and office

A page from the constitution

Constitution.

Article 1

Title & Object

The name of this Society shall be the Boston Young Men's Christian Association, and its object the improvement of the spiritual and mental condition of young men.

Article 2

Members.

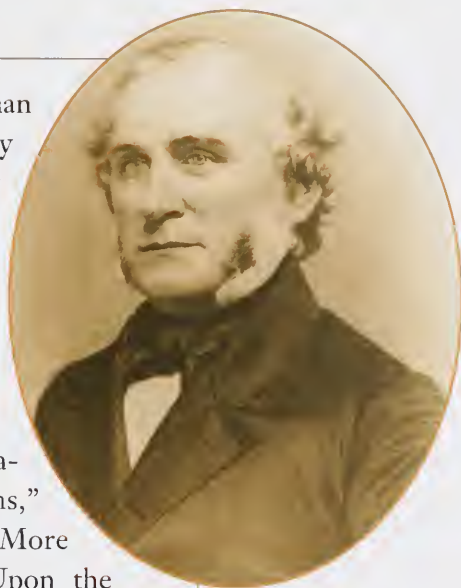
Section 1. Active members.—Any young man who is a member in regular standing of an Evangelical Church, may become an active member of this Association by the payment of one dollar annually. Active members only shall have the right to vote and be eligible to office.

privileges. Associate members—“any young man of good moral character”—could join the Y by paying annual dues of one dollar, but did not have voting privileges. Life membership was available for a one-time payment of \$20.⁸ There were no restrictions beyond that: from the beginning, the Association was an interdenominational organization meant to serve all Protestants.⁹

The constitution also provided for four organizing committees—“Library and Rooms,” “Lectures,” “Publications,” and “Finance.” More committees would be added—“Attendance Upon the Sick,” “Employment,” and “Boarding Houses”—and activities would become increasingly diverse in the years ahead. Like the qualifications for membership, the constitution would serve as a model for YMCAs all over the country.¹⁰ To maintain a close connection with the evangelical churches of Boston, the Board of Managers established a Standing Committee, which consisted of two people from each of these churches. A departure from the London Y and unique to the Boston Y, the Standing Committee was to seek out young men who had recently arrived in Boston, help them find boarding houses and employment, and interest the evangelical churches in the Association’s welfare.¹¹

On January 5, 1852, the Association elected Francis O. Watts, a prominent attorney, its first President, and began active operations.¹² Membership totaled 600. Over the next several weeks, the Y’s leadership devoted its time to fundraising and publicizing the fledgling organization in the religious community. Most critical was a search for a permanent location. The Association’s mission informed its choice:

*...the importance of a central location, easy of access and attractive to young men. If we would induce young men to frequent our rooms instead of places of danger; we must provide such as are pleasant in themselves and attractive on account of the society there found and the entertainment furnished, ...rooms more attractive in all respects than the boarding houses where the young men severally reside.*¹³



Francis O. Watts

1852

On January 5, the Boston YMCA elects Francis O. Watts its first President.



Rooms on the fourth floor above Jones and Ball's store at the corner of Washington and Summer Streets in downtown Boston, where Macy's is located today, matched the mission. Those who wished to catch up on the news from their hometowns found the reading room filled with out-of-town newspapers, religious weeklies, and magazines of the day; adjacent to the reading room was the library. Sullivan donated the first

two volumes—two Bibles, one in the language of the Sandwich islands, and one in English by the Rev. Henry Upham. The Library Committee determined that “no books should be admitted to our library, but until careful examination, they were found to have nothing that tended to injure the right principles of any young man.”¹⁴ The Y approached major publishing houses and prominent individuals for contributions. The library soon contained a few hundred donated volumes on a range of Christian subjects.

On the evening of March 11, 1852, a special service celebrated the public opening of the YMCA:

The exercises were closed with the Doxology; and as six hundred male voices joined in it, Bishop, Rector, and Minister; Episcopalian, Baptist, Methodist, and Congregationalist, with the earnestness and devotion of those who loved “one Savior” who had “bought them with his own precious blood,” we all felt that we could join with our whole hearts in the words the venerable Dr. Beecher had just uttered, “I always felt sure the Millennium would come, but never so sure of it as now. I can breathe a longer breath than ever I breathed before. Glory to God! You will stand steadfast and sure, and go on in this good work until your great adversary the devil is turned into Hell.” Our hearts were now indeed cheered; we “thanked God and took courage.”¹⁵

On May 25, the Association accepted an act of incorporation from the governor of Massachusetts.



Jones and Ball's store on the corner of Washington and Summer Streets

Early Growth

Activities at the new organization got under way, and the number of members grew rapidly—so rapidly, in fact, that the Y had to find new space the following year. In the spring of 1853, the Association rented a suite of rooms, in the newly built Tremont Temple, located on Tremont Street a few blocks away. An improvement over the two rooms at Washington and Summer, the new space featured a large reading and library room, with three other rooms for prayer meetings, committees, and social gatherings. Situated in a church-owned building, the space became a place where clergymen of different denominations in the Boston area interacted. The library proved very popular with the general membership, as well as with women, who were granted library privileges but not allowed to become members.¹⁶

During the early years, the Y established programs that were to become fundamental to the organization throughout its history. Following the constitution's mandate for the "Spiritual and Mental Improvement of Young Men," the Association established classes in the "Study of the Bible," and "Intellectual Improvement." The latter, a bimonthly offering, featured the reading of original compositions as well as debates and declamations. While targeting a very different audience from the Bible class, the goal was the same:

The exercises...call forth the latent talent of many a young mind, and draw out powers of reasoning and research which would otherwise, perhaps, slumber inactive forever. Moreover, these meetings prove instrumental in forging friendships, and in cultivating that genial sociality and happy companionship so indispensable to the comfort of young and ardent souls...the purest principles of our evangelical Christianity interpenetrate and sustain the whole. Many careless young men, who could not be persuaded to attend the meetings for prayer; or the Bible Class, have been induced to join this class, and

1852

Boston's first street railway service begins between Harvard Square, Cambridge, and Union Square, Somerville.



An advertisement for the Reading Room and Library at Tremont Temple

BOSTON
YOUNG MEN'S
CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION,
ROOMS, TREMONT TEMPLE.
E. B. BRANCH, 35 MERIDIAN STREET.
READING ROOM AND LIBRARY
Open Daily from 9 A. M. to 10 P. M.; Branch Rooms
Open Daily from 6 to 10 P. M.
Free to All.

MEETINGS.
The MONTHLY MEETINGS of the ASSOCIATION are held on the first Thursday Evening of each month, excepting July and August.
SOCIAL GATHERINGS of the Members and Ladies once each month.
PRAYER AND CONFERENCE MEETINGS every Morning (except Sunday), 8½ to 9½ o'clock, and every Evening (except Sabbath Evening), from 9 to 10 o'clock.
The LITERARY CLASS meets every other Wednesday Evening, from September to May, inclusive.
The BIBLE CLASS meets every Saturday Evening, at 8 o'clock.
PRAYER MEETINGS at EAST BOSTON ROOMS on Monday, Wednesday and Friday Evenings, at 9 to 9½ o'clock; and on Sabbath Evening at 6½ o'clock.
Members changing their place of business or residence will please notify the Librarian, L. P. ROWLAND, JR., at Tremont Temple.
Donations to the Association, or books for the Library, will be gratefully received.
Young men desiring private religious conversation are cordially invited to meet Mr. Rowland at the Rooms, Saturday evening.
Form of Request.—I give and bequeath to "The Young Men's Christian Association," a Corp. Inc. established under the laws of Massachusetts, the sum of \$ — and the receipt of the Treasurer thereof shall be a sufficient discharge to my executors for the same.

have become interested in the Association. By mingling with the members their prejudices have been gradually removed, and they have been more willing to accept the invitations of their companions to attend the Bible Class and in numerous instances have thus been led to the foot of the cross.¹⁷

Because demand for this class was so great, in the late 1850s the Class for Intellectual Improvement became a full-fledged lecture series called “Literacy Class.” The Annual Report of 1859 states that this class “continues to be a very important auxiliary of the Association, as we believe many, through its means, are led to the rooms who would not otherwise be seen there.”¹⁸

The Y’s programs reached beyond the walls of Tremont Temple. Constantly alert to addressing the concerns of its constituency, the YMCA furnished a list of recommended boarding houses in the area to young men looking for a place to live. One grateful recipient wrote:

*When I first came to the city I was not acquainted with any person to whom I might look for counsel and advice. I was induced to visit the rooms of the Boston Young Men’s Christian Association, where I found those that were ready to give that advice so much needed. God Bless the Young Men’s Christian Association.*¹⁹

During this period, the Y also launched an employment service. Twelve members of the Standing Committee representing “different branches of business” in the city provided business introductions and employment advice.²⁰ From the beginning, the Boston Y provided housing and education, and employment programs that remain part of the Y mission today.

The Association leadership believed its value was not limited to the young men in its membership and aimed to serve an important function for Boston business and society as a whole:

Our Association should receive the sympathy and aid of every business man and of every true patriot, as well as every Christian. We are striving to cultivate in young men those

EVENING CLASSES

BOOKKEEPING. FRENCH. VOCAL MUSIC. PENMANSHIP.

Lyceum, debates, orations, declamations, and essays once a week. See page 7.

LECTURES.

Free admission for members and one lady to lectures.— Popular, Literary, Historical, and Scientific,—twice a month during the winter. See page 11.

For Moral and Spiritual Welfare.

A safe and attractive resort, open day and evening, Sundays included. Good Companionship, opportunities for benevolent work, Bible Class and reference library, daily religious meetings, and Special Course of Sermons by able preachers. See page 10.

FOR BODILY COMFORT.

Wash and cloak rooms free, and hot and cold baths, hair cutting, etc., etc., at very low rates, viz:

Baths,	\$.10
5 Hair Cutting Tickets,	1.00
5 Shampoo Tickets,	1.00
11 Shaving Tickets,	1.00

These advantages are all first-class.

Concerning gymnasium, etc., See page 5.

ANNUAL TICKET, entitling to all the above advantages, \$1.00.

A description of evening classes offered by the Y in 1875–1876

1854

The Boston Y forms the YMCA Temperance Society to guide young men on the path of sobriety.



A booklet distributed by the Boston Young Men's Christian Association

*principles of uprightness, honor, and love to men, which will produce diligence, honesty, and faithfulness in business, and intelligent and comprehensive patriotism in public affairs. Let them invest their money with us and we will make them large returns in ingenuous, cultivated, right principled young men, fitted for stations of high trust and usefulness.*²¹

To spread the word, the Y disseminated copies of its constitution to evangelical ministers throughout Boston and New England. Members distributed tracts on religious subjects in Tremont Temple and on the Boston Common.

The results of these developments were impressive. In 1853–1854, the Boston YMCA boasted 1,600 members of all denominations and classes, including 150 life subscriptions. Approximately 70 percent came from outside Boston—elsewhere in New England, the United States, British North America, and other foreign countries. Most members held middle-class occupations: wholesale and retail merchants, clerks, bookkeepers, bank tellers, salesmen, artisans, and a few professionals. Even in these early days, the Y membership also included its share of noted community leaders—politicians like Senator Charles Sumner, evangelist and antislavery crusader Edward Beecher, railroad magnate Alden Speare, clothier and Boston University founder Jacob Sleeper, and philanthropist Amos Lawrence. Said the Annual Report of 1853:

*The mothers and fathers throughout the country know of us and our object, and are sending their sons to our care. We have all the means to receive them and introduce them to such religious and social associations as shall be suited to their tastes, early education, and best good.*²²

From its very first days, the Boston YMCA responded to the demands of the society it served, offering religious guidance, intellectual stimulation, and social outlets, while offering help with employment and lodgings. At the same time, it served as a model for the YMCAs springing up all over—25 in American cities and 1 in Montreal by early 1854.

GOOD NEWS FOR YOU!

GOD LOVES YOU!

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—*John* iii. 16.

God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.—*Rom.* v. 8.

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us.—*1 John* iii. 16.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.—*1 John* iv. 10.

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.—*Isa.* liii. 5.

The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.—*2 Peter* iii. 9.

Expansion Efforts: The First Branch

During that crucial first decade, the Boston YMCA made a concerted effort to reach young men outside of the downtown area. As a result of the expansion of the shipping industry, developers eager to increase access to Boston harbor had enlarged the waterfronts of East Boston and South Boston in the 1830s. These areas developed major shipbuilding and wharf facilities, and their residential populations grew rapidly. While people in East Boston in particular wanted to take part in Y activities, they found Tremont Temple inaccessible: the trip required a ferry ride across Boston harbor and a horse and carriage ride through the North End.

In 1856, in order to reach the people of East Boston, the Y began providing an extension program in various evangelical churches in the neighborhood. The program consisted of meetings for prayer and conference and a class for intellectual improvement and social intercourse. In 1867, the Association formed its first official branch, the East Boston Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association, in Reed's Hall.²³ Subsidies from the Association covered the new branch's costs; but this arrangement was financially not feasible over time. In 1868, the Y made East Boston an autonomous YMCA, with churches in the area helping to defray operating expenses.²⁴ The East Boston experience proved a model for future endeavors. In fact, when the community of South Boston proposed a YMCA branch, the Boston Association suggested instead that they form an independent Y with the help of local churches.

The Association continued to expand the scope of its evangelical efforts, reaching out to the community at large. According to the Annual Report of 1857,

Boston Common, on the Sabbath, is thronged by thousands who seldom or never enter our churches. Idlers, triflers, infidels and pleasure-seekers swarm along its malls, while the worldly poor irreligious man brings out his family, to enjoy through recreation, as he says, this his only holiday. These souls are perishing through a famine of the word of God and the chilling influences of unbelief. It is not enough to say to them, "Be

While people in East Boston in particular wanted to take part in Y activities, they found Tremont Temple inaccessible: the trip required a ferry ride across Boston harbor and a horse and carriage ride through the North End.

1857

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts authorizes the Back Bay Commissioners to fill and sell the

Commonwealth's lands there.



*ye warmed and filled," but Christians must go forth bearing to them, in the arms of their love the Bread of Life, and those garments of spiritual life and beauty which Christ so freely offers to all.*²⁵

Tremont Temple hosted many public lectures on religious subjects and sermons on Biblical texts. Soon it became a place where pastors from various denominations met and exchanged views.

In 1856, the Y began providing religious programs for the community in the form of mass revival meetings "for the utterance of the simple truths of the gospel to the multitude."²⁶ Thousands attended these Sunday evening sermons on the Boston Common under a great tent. One manager reported:

*At the close of one of the preaching services upon the Common last fall, a young man came to me in deep agitation. He said that he was a stranger in the city—that he was deeply anxious for the salvation of his soul, and that he desired the sympathy and advice of Christian young men. I obtained from him the promise to meet me on the following evening at the "Rooms." He did so—joined the Association, and attended the prayer-meeting that evening. I met him there several times after that, and have more than once had the pleasure of hearing him tell what God has done for his soul.*²⁷

These handouts advertised meetings on Boston Common.

B. Y. M. C. ASSOCIATION.

OPEN AIR MEETING!

Bet. School and Beethoven Sts., Egleston Sq.,

This Sabbath Afternoon,

AT 4.45 O'CLOCK.

Good Speaking!

Singing Led by Cornet!

THE PUBLIC CORDIALLY INVITED

B. Y. M. C. A.

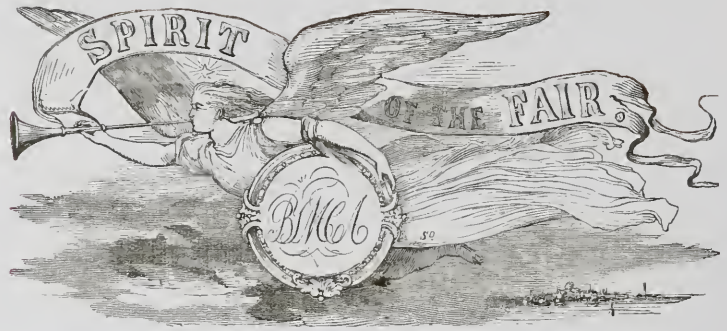
Gospel Temperance Meeting

ASSOCIATION HALL, Cor. Tremont and Elliot Sts.

EVERY SUNDAY EVENING AT 7.30.

Young Men are Specially Invited.

A masthead from a publication dated December 27, 1858, showing an angel, the “Spirit of the Fair,” holding an emblem with the initials of the Boston Young Men’s Christian Association



Early Setbacks

The growth and prosperity that the country had enjoyed for the past dozen years came to an end when the Panic of 1857, a major Wall Street crash, closed factories and businesses everywhere. During the depression, hundreds of thousands lost their jobs and others went on short time or took wage cuts. Relief and public works in northern cities alleviated financial hardship, while religious revivals reduced emotional distress.

Like many organizations around the country, the Boston YMCA saw its membership plummet. Estimating that some 3,700 young men were available to join, the Association immediately launched a citywide canvassing effort that included sailors stationed in Boston harbor. Approximately 50 members distributed cards inscribed with Bible texts and an invitation to visit the rooms of the Y.²⁸ At the same time, the Y continued to reach out to the general public, establishing daily noon prayer meetings and handing out Bibles and religious tracts. Despite these efforts, however, membership continued to decline and debt mounted.

In response, the Boston Association devised an ingenious new method for raising funds—the Christmas Fair. Organized chiefly by women in the community, the fair took place at the Music Hall for a week in December. Evergreens and decorations that included a Chinese pagoda provided holiday cheer. Booths selling “wearing apparel, needle or shell work” and “preparations from nature” netted \$1,400 and \$11,000 at the fairs of 1857 and 1858 respectively, and enabled the Y to weather greater crises looming ahead.²⁹



The Crisis of Civil War³⁰

The outbreak of war between North and South presented new challenges for the Boston YMCA far graver than those of the early years. Membership dropped drastically as young men left for the front lines. Funds dried up at once, forcing the Y to reduce its programs; again, the Y adapted its services to meet the expectations of its constituency.

Remaining true to its mission, the Boston Y turned its attention to another group of young men, the Union soldiers. In November 1861, leaders of YMCAs from Boston and a number of other northern cities established the

A Civil War soldier from Massachusetts

In aid of the Building Fund, a fair was held by the Boston Young Men's Christian Association at the Music Hall in December 21 through 30, 1858.

1857

The Panic of 1857 causes the Y's revenues to drop precipitously and spurs the organization to develop new fundraising techniques, most notably, the Christmas Fair.

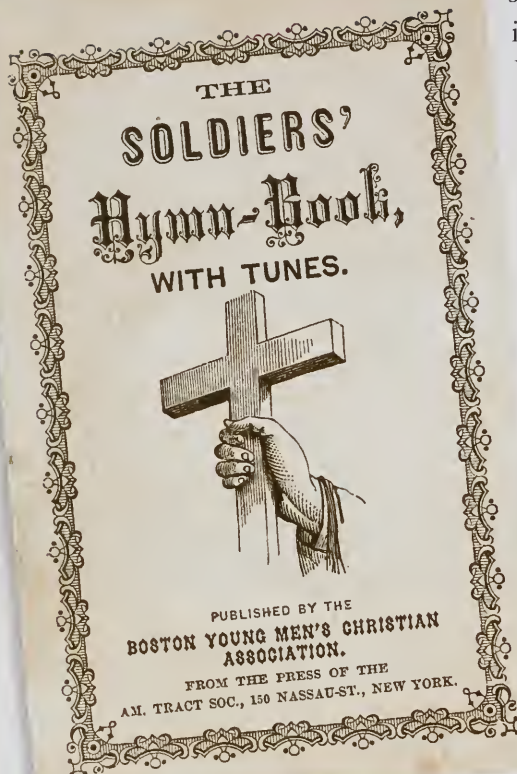


United States Christian Commission to take “active measures to promote the spiritual and temporal welfare of the soldiers in the United States army.”³¹ This was the first time the Boston

YMCA assumed an active role in a national Y effort. Before this, the Y leadership had shied away from national meetings and agendas, largely because other YMCAs did not all share its evangelical mission. Now, however, there were more pressing matters to consider.³²

The Y adapted to wartime demands. The Library Rooms served as a station for recruiting men who enlisted in Company A 45th Regiment, Massachusetts Nine Months Volunteers, mostly members of the Boston Association.³³

At the same time, the Boston Y engaged in fundraising for the Union effort—and raised more than any other association. Charles Desmond, a founder and former President of the Boston Y and one of original members of the U.S. Commission, described the scene in the Boston Exchange in July 1863. It was soon after the battles of Gettysburg and Vicksburg, twin turning points in the war:



This hymn book was given to Civil War soldiers.

When we were receiving money after the battle of Gettysburg, one day there was written upon the great blackboard upon which were put the telegraph dispatches, “Vicksburg has surrendered. U. S. Grant.” Instantly shouts went up from the assembled merchants. They all uncovered and joined in singing, “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.” Someone said, “Let us show our gratitude by our gifts,” and the crowd came to our table, and for some time we could not take the money as fast as it was offered....Contributions soon began to come in by mail on each of the occasions mentioned, and continued after we left the Exchange until the funds received were \$100,000, \$60,000 and \$50,000.³⁴

In addition, the Boston Y collected hospital supplies, clothing, blankets, and food, and provided volunteers to distribute those supplies to the front. Association volunteers also attended to soldiers' spiritual needs. They preached and prayed with them at the front, and circulated religious books and tracts.³⁵

One man in particular stood behind the Y's wartime efforts; he was Levi P. Rowland, Jr. A convert to Christianity at a young age, Rowland believed his role in life was to show others the Christian way. A member of the Y in Springfield, Massachusetts, he founded the first Hi Y, an Association for high school students in Springfield, and later founded the Y in Salem, Massachusetts. Rowland moved to Boston, where he became librarian of the YMCA in 1858. A leading participant in the U.S. Commission, Rowland assumed the role of Agent of the Army Committee in New England, overseeing the collection and distribution of more than one million cases of relief supplies. Rowland eventually became the first General Secretary of the Boston Y, a position he held continuously from 1868 until 1873.³⁶ A prolific writer, Rowland also composed a number of pamphlets—"Hints and Helps to Young Christians That Greatly Helped Me," "You Are Going to the Wrong Train," and "How to Use the Bible." In addition, he compiled a *YMCA Hymn Book* and a *Soldier's Hymn Book, with Tunes*. "Dear Reader," the latter begins,

*The circumstances that now surround you are different from any previous ones, and your peril is much greater; you need therefore a greater friend....Such a friend is Jesus....We desire to do all in our power to supply the religious wants of our brave defenders. And will be most happy to become the medium of communication between them and their friends; or in any other practicable way to mitigate their inconveniences and diminish their deprivations....You are invited to visit our Rooms, when you return home.*³⁷

1864

On April 9, news of General Lee's surrender at Appomattox reaches Boston, spurring celebrations throughout the city.



Levi P. Rowland, Jr. wrote many pamphlets for the YMCA.

"You are Going to the Wrong Train."

A TRUE STORY.



BY L. P. ROWLAND.

During the Centennial Year, A. D. 1876, while Secretary of the Philadelphia Y. M. C. A., a young man called and asked if I

-1-

**The Boston Y
survived the
war, but it
was in the
minority; of
240 associations
in existence
in 1861, only
60 remained.**



L. P. Rowland, Jr.,
General Secretary
1868–1873

Hundreds of thousands of these pamphlets found their way into the hands of Union soldiers during the course of the war.³⁸

In 1865, the Army Committee reported:

*the fratricidal war commenced in our country in 1861 has, by the victorious army of the Union, under the signal blessing of Almighty God, been brought to a successful and final termination....The facts which they now have the privilege to record show that New England, during the past year, as heretofore, has borne her full share of the duty of alleviating the bodily sufferings, and of ministering to the spiritual necessities of the soldiers and seamen, by whose valor and sacrifice her homes have been defended.*³⁹

The Boston Y survived the war, but was in the minority; of 240 associations in existence in 1861, only 60 remained.⁴⁰ The Association could count itself among the survivors because it had a strong financial base that, though certainly not unassailable, was stronger than most.

Reconstruction

After Appomattox, the nation entered the years of Reconstruction, a period characterized economically by a resumption of industrial growth and prosperity, but also by labor unrest and industrial violence. During this period, a number of benevolent religious organizations were established, including the Boston Young Women's Christian Association, the Boston Young Men's Hebrew Association, and the Young Men's Catholic Association.

Its treasury depleted and membership in decline after four years of war, the Boston Y began to put back the pieces and think about the future. Under Rowland's leadership, the Association continued to view its mission as primarily evangelical in nature. This meant taking a leading role in Boston revivalist activities and extending the organization's influence throughout the state. In 1866, the Y sponsored a mass meeting on Boston Common. Local ministers conducted services, while Association members distributed religious pamphlets.

1869

The Y resolves to buy a building of its own.



Later that year, the Y sponsored a Massachusetts Christian convention at Tremont Temple. Attended by 1,200 evangelical ministers from all over the state, it spurred county conventions throughout New England. During the 1869 International Peace Jubilee that drew some 300,000 people to Boston, the Association held services in a tent, and members handed out 108,000 religious tracts on the Common and at the Coliseum.⁴¹

Although the Y focused its attention on its evangelical mission, it recognized the need to rebuild and expand the membership critical to financial solvency. During the late 1860s, the Association launched several membership drives, and introduced a new level of membership, the “Sustaining Member,” who paid \$5 per year. It was hoped that “Men of Business” and “Christians” would find this new membership appealing.⁴² By the end of the decade, the number of members approached prewar levels, reaching nearly 1,700. Not surprisingly, the membership was, by and large, “active”—people whose evangelical zeal matched that of the Association.

The Association also engaged in active fundraising. A Christmas fair held in 1869 netted nearly \$33,000, more than twice the amount raised by the fair a decade earlier.⁴³ In addition to raising money for operating expenses, the YMCA now had one very specific goal in mind. The rooms at Tremont Temple were inadequate and prohibitively expensive. The Y leadership determined it was time to purchase its own space and provide an Association building.

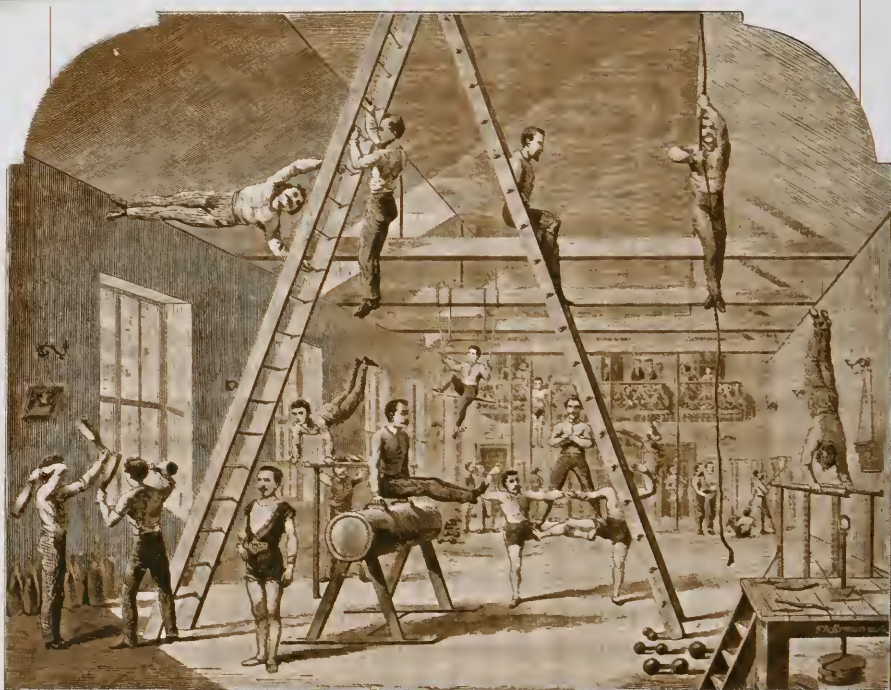
Although the Boston Y was the first American Association, it was not the first to take this step. New York had its own building, constructed in 1869, and San Francisco built one soon afterwards. Both facilities included a gymnasium, reflecting the Christian belief that the body, like the mind, required cultivation and strengthening. These buildings also reflected a trend in the postwar period: the rising popularity of sports and gymnastics and the construction of athletic clubs and gymnasiums in cities nationwide.⁴⁴ For the Boston Y, the gymnasium would serve two additional purposes: it would provide both the means for attracting new members and a good environment for them once they arrived.



A building located at Tremont and Eliot Streets in downtown Boston was perfect. Dubbed the “Gymnasium Building,” it had what was considered one of the best gymnasiums in the country and the facility spanned the entire fourth floor of the building. The second floor contained a library, office for the General Secretary, reading room, and parlor. The third floor had a 600-seat auditorium that could be converted for other activities, as well as a committee room, and a closet room. The ground floor consisted of four storefronts that could be rented—a welcome source of income for the growing organization.⁴⁵

The move to the Gymnasium Building in 1872 inaugurated expansion on all levels—membership, programs, and the Association’s conception of its mission—in the years to come.

The Gymnasium Building was located at Tremont and Eliot Streets in downtown Boston.



Activities in the gymnasium



The Bazaar of Nations, spring of 1873

Troubled Times

The Gymnasium Building facilities were very popular and the number of members began rising at once. Capitalizing on this opportunity, the Association created a Gymnasium membership. The annual fee was \$20 (later reduced to \$10 annually or \$5 for three months), “with no extra charge for towels.”⁴⁶ In the spring of 1873, the Y organized the Bazaar of Nations in the old Music Hall. Much larger in scope than previous fundraisers, the Bazaar entailed travel to Europe to gather materials and a substantial infusion of capital, which 70 leading Boston citizens provided. Open to the public for nearly four weeks, it netted an impressive \$52,000.⁴⁷

A few months later, the Panic of 1873 broke, precipitating a depression that lasted until late in the decade. This depression,

1874

The Boston Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA) is formed.



the worst of the nineteenth century, affected all sectors of the economy. Between 1873 and 1875, 18,000 businesses failed and unemployment reached 14 percent nationally.⁴⁸ Beneficent organizations were hardly immune. Many YMCAs closed down operations. For the Boston Y, these dire straits were exacerbated by the Great Fire of 1872, which devastated 65 acres of downtown Boston:

Our building was preserved but nearly every member had suffered loss in some form. Hundreds were thrown out of employment. Many were put upon reduced salaries. The way looked dark for the moment. Large numbers had called upon us in ordinary winters for food and lodgings; and this event, it was at once seen, would largely increase the number. Our resources would be cut off for the present, at least, as our good friends would not know whether they had anything to give.⁴⁹

Facing a drastic decline in resources, the Boston Y concentrated on providing the core services the community needed

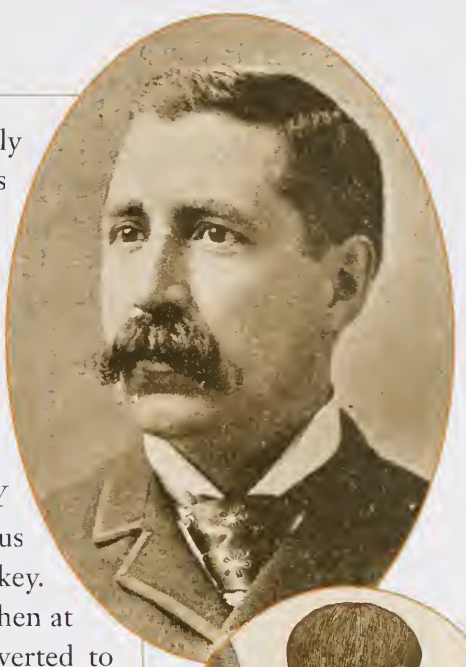
Devastation from the
Great Fire of Boston, 1872



most. In the 1870s—not unlike other economically pressing times—the evangelistic movement was stronger than ever. Responding to the demand, from June to October, the Boston Y held regular outdoor meetings, where attendance averaged one thousand people per meeting. The Y also devoted much energy to distributing religious literature and to converting wayward souls, especially those of sailors and railroad men. The results of this work became apparent later in the decade, when the Y acted as headquarters to a major revival led by famous evangelists Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey. Moody's ties to the Boston Y dated back to 1854, when at the age of 17 he arrived in Boston and was converted to Christianity. He went on to become a major figure in the Chicago YMCA and Christian Commission, and one of the leading evangelists of his day.

During the 1870s, the Association's employment services were expanded, including the formation of an employment bureau and the hiring of the first full-time employment specialist. The demand was great. In 1879, for example, some 2,000 came to the Y looking for work and 627 were considered "competent and reliable." Of those, the Y found jobs for 330. It was clear that the Y considered this the "means of bringing within our influence many young men that we would otherwise not reach."⁵⁰ To encourage contact with key industries in the city, the Y held "trade receptions," where business leaders gave speeches and met informally with Association members.

Eager to find funds to cover its operating expenses, the Y looked for ways to increase membership that would bring in new members without counteracting its evangelical aims. The answer was apparent: develop the gymnasium facilities, which had brought in hundreds of new members in the past few years. Recognizing the need for professional expertise, in the mid-1870s, the Association hired Robert Jeffries Roberts to run the gymnasium program. A devout Baptist and member of the Y, Roberts had devised a unique exercise system after a fall during an acrobatic maneuver. Convinced of the necessity of adapting the gymnasium to the needs of the average man, he developed a "light, systematic, scientific exercise,



Robert Jeffries Roberts and the advertisement depicting Roberts's muscular back

1876

Robert Jeffries Roberts becomes Superintendent of the Boston YMCA gymnasium.



judiciously applied, for the promoting of health and strength.”⁵¹ Posters depicting Roberts’s muscular back invited people to attend his lectures on the benefits of physical fitness. “Come and join us,” he later wrote,

*you who feel weak, and timid, and only half alive, and we will help you. One must gymnasticate, or practice body-building work, if they would be saved physically. We aim for mental and spiritual strength, and even perfection; why not bodily perfection as far as the framework of our body will allow? The command, “Be ye perfect,” was not pronounced in mockery. God meant just what he said; and if moral perfection is within our grasp, surely physical is. We must never forget that the laws that govern the stomach, muscles, nervous system, and the more private parts of our bodies are as much God’s law as those which govern our moral nature. Many Christian men, if judged by their actions, ignore these facts, and by so doing develop sickly and obese bodies, and then think it is the will of God if they are thus afflicted; when the Lord has nothing to do with the matter; it being their own fault.*⁵²

Roberts’s program in the Y’s “Hall of Health” proved an instant success, prompting hundreds of men interested in “body building” (he coined the term) to sign up for the Gymnasium membership. (Less clear was the impact of the program on evangelical pursuits: the Y later acknowledged that the new members were hardly interested in that side of the organization.) In 1887, Roberts would take his ideas of physical fitness to the Springfield School for Christian Workers (later Springfield College), where in conjunction with Luther Halsey Gulick he would head the department of Instruction of Practical Gymnastics and develop a program to train physical fitness directors.⁵³ Roberts’s contributions soon caught on with YMCAs across the country and around the world.

This period also witnessed, in 1875, the launching of the first coordinated educational program, made possible through a bequest of \$5,000 by Dr. George E. Hatton. For a small fee, students

The first coordinated educational program included first aid classes.



could take classes in music, French, shorthand, penmanship, and bookkeeping. Enrollments for the vocational subjects tended to be the highest—though decidedly less popular than the gymnasium. Further development of the educational program would come 20 years later, with the founding of the Evening Institute.⁵⁴

In the late 1870s, the United States began recovering from the depression. The Boston Y, noted General Secretary M. R. Deming, passed the test with flying colors:

*It might well be supposed that in these unprecedented hard times, the finances of the Association would feel the general depression, and fall short of the amount desired to carry on the work properly. But while our own faith has at times faltered, the Lord has abundantly prospered His own work, and means have been forthcoming to do more than ever before.*⁵⁵

While other Associations weakened or closed, the Boston Y enlarged both its membership and its coffers. Various methods of raising money—fundraising, creation of the Gymnasium membership, and fees for educational classes—had all played a role. The Y had achieved financial stability in economically difficult times, and had become a fixture in the city of Boston.



In the nearly 30 years following its founding, the Boston YMCA weathered numerous crises—depression, civil war, and more depression—and survived as a stronger, more resilient organization. Remaining true to its origins, the Association provided support in turbulent times, offering spiritual, intellectual, and later, physical support to the Boston community. The community repaid the Y in kind, providing the financial support that enabled the Association not only to survive but also to grow—to purchase its own building, create innovative programs, and increase the size of the membership.

1875

Boston's population swells to over 340,000, a 200,000 increase in 10 years.



M. R. Deming,
General Secretary
1873–1918

Spring Lane Chapel,
birthplace of the Boston
Young Men's Christian
Association



1880–1913

1880

German Branch
is founded

1883

Boylston Street
Building is
completed

1884

Tremont Row
Branch is
established

1888

Boston Y
adopts
a new
constitution

1896

Evening
Institute of
the Boston
Young Men's
Christian
Association
is founded



Typewriting class, Evening Institute

CHAPTER TWO

Broadening the Focus, 1880–1913

1899

Camp Buena Vista opens



1903

Evening Institute offers first course on automobiles



1909

Day School of Co-operative Engineering and Association Day School are established



1912

On October 2, President Taft lays cornerstone of Huntington Avenue building



1913

Huntington Avenue building is completed

No greater or more startling truth could be announced from this platform than the one which has been frequently brought to our notice of late—and that is, that no greater peril threatens our modern civilization and our modern Christian life than that which is found in the tendency of the present age to mass populations in great cities....Cities which number their populations by hundreds of thousands are rapidly multiplying on every hand.¹

The transformation of American society set in motion before the Civil War accelerated rapidly during the late nineteenth century. Advances in technology, such as the electric light bulb, elevator, and internal combustion engine, expanded industrial capacity. And improvements in transportation and communications, including national railroad and telegraph networks, the automobile, the telephone, and the typewriter, linked cities and rural towns, helping to create a national economy. John D. Rockefeller, J. P. Morgan, and Henry Ford became household names, and the labor movement came of age.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the number of Boston area residents stood at over a million, with nearly two-thirds of foreign birth or parentage.

During this period of industrial revolution, immigrants poured into cities. In response, American cities expanded physically and developed public facilities—libraries, museums, and concert halls—while urban leaders championed the rights of the growing population. In this era of robber barons and reformers, social organizations found a new calling.²

Boston exemplified many of these developments. In the 1880s, the Irish, French Canadians, Germans, Italians, and Russian Jews streamed into the city in vast numbers, resulting in the highest rate of population growth of any decade before or since. By the end of the nineteenth century, the number of Boston area residents stood at over a million, with nearly two-thirds of foreign birth or parentage.

The Boston these immigrants found was quite different from the city their predecessors had found some 40 years earlier. In the late 1850s, Boston had embarked on a lengthy period of physical expansion, widening streets, filling marshes, leveling hills, and creating parks. By the early 1880s, the land area of Boston had increased greatly. This growth would continue in the years ahead. The electrification of street railways later in the decade—and then the development of the Tremont Street subway, the first subway in the United States—granted a new degree of mobility to people previously limited to the downtown area. A large outer ring of commuters' homes sprang up in the suburbs, many of which were annexed to the city. By 1900, Boston stretched over a 10-mile radius and contained 31 cities and towns, including Roxbury, Dorchester, Brighton, Charlestown, and West Roxbury.³

The Boston YMCA responded to the challenges of urbanization in a variety of ways. During the 30 years before World War I, it opened its doors to the people of Boston, creating branches, reducing requirements for membership, and expanding programs. At the same time, “YM” in the moniker assumed new meaning as the Association evolved from a fledgling group of amateurs devoted to evangelical causes into a financially stable organization of professionals focused on helping young men adapt to life in the big city.

Building in Back Bay

During the early 1880s, the Boston YMCA was in a position to rethink its objectives. In an attempt to return to its roots, it declared its intention to refocus its energies away from older men and women and back on the young men for whose sake the Association was founded. At a time when the evils of the city—saloons, burlesque shows, and other disreputable establishments—were a young man's primary social outlets, the Y sought to provide a healthy substitute, a place where he could spend leisure time and absorb the Christian virtues of sobriety, honesty, industry, and thrift. Alfred S. Woodworth, the Association's President for most of the decade, would lead the way in this endeavor.⁴

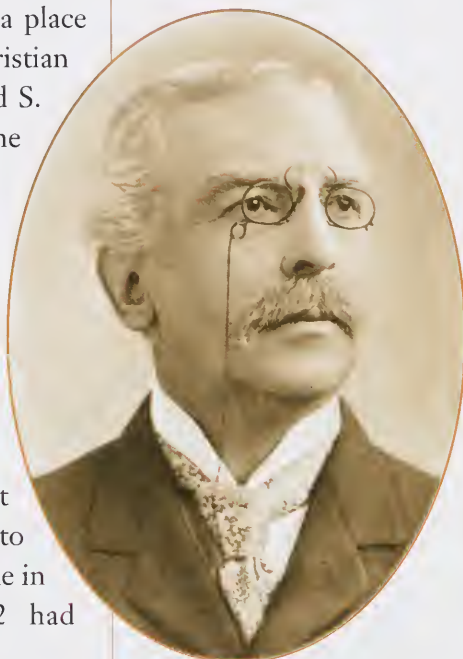
In 1881, Woodworth addressed the foremost challenge confronting the Association. With the recent surge in membership, the Gymnasium Building on Tremont Street was bursting at its seams. The Y had to find facilities that would accommodate this growth and anticipate future needs. Although in the past the Association had solved this problem by taking over an existing space, this solution no longer sufficed. What was needed now was a new building, designed to meet the Y's specific needs. The Association lost no time in launching a fundraising campaign, and by 1882 had amassed \$200,000.⁵

The next challenge was to find the right location. This time around, it would not be in the downtown area. Ever since 1872, when the Great Fire forced a mass exodus of the local population, the central part of the city no longer seemed a viable location.

The Association focused on the Back Bay, until recently a marshy area between the Charles River and downtown Boston. In the late 1850s, developers recognized the Back

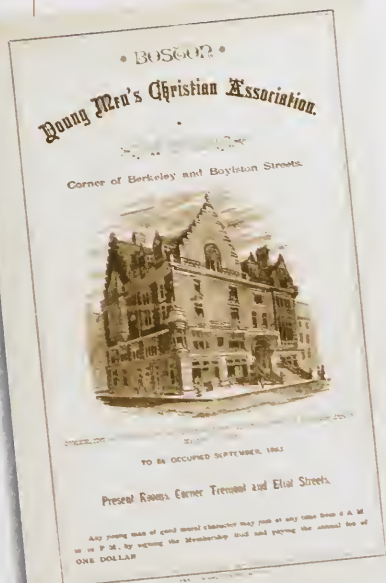
1885

Hugh O'Brien, Boston's first Irish-born mayor, takes office.



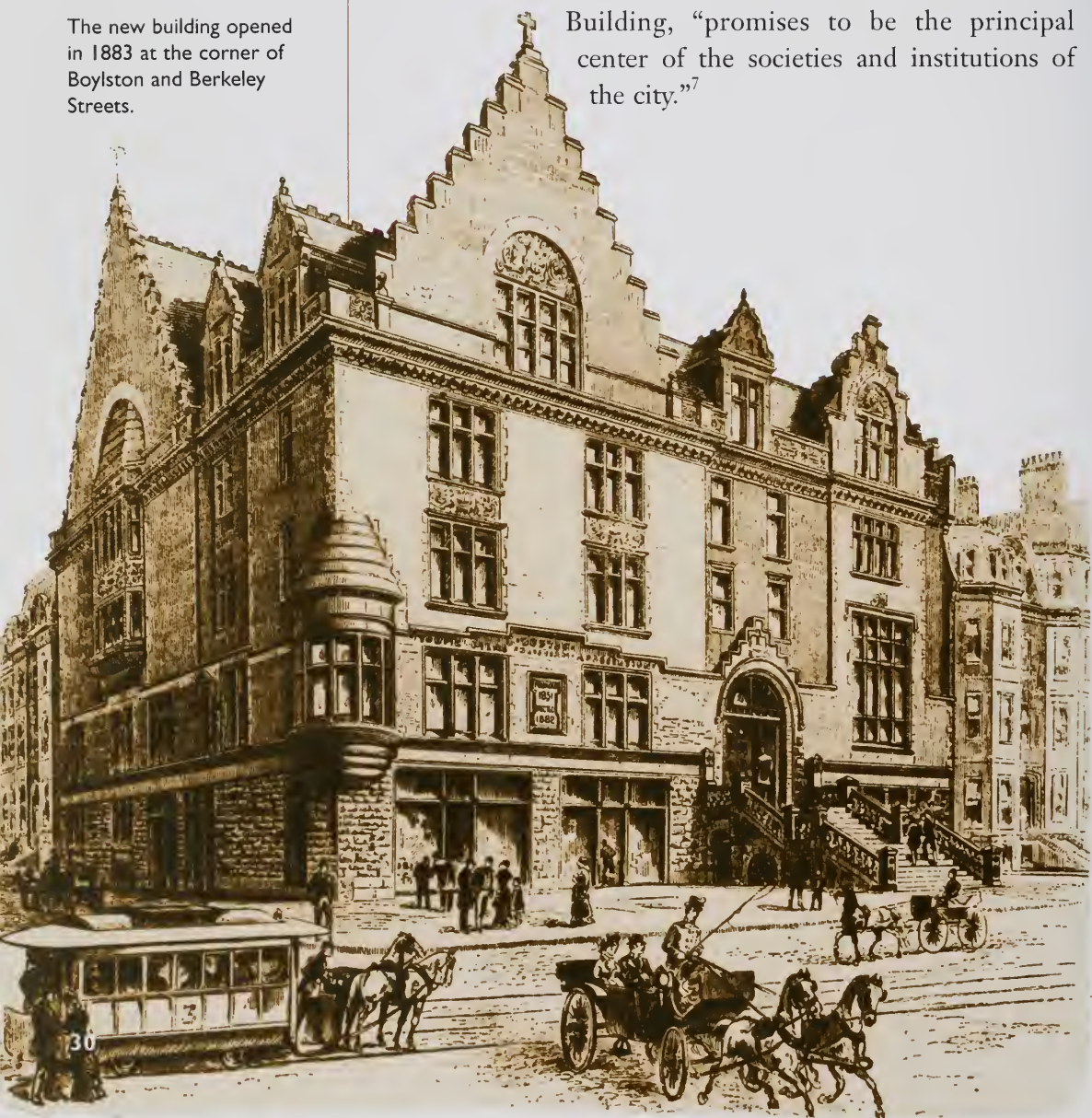
Above: Alfred S. Woodworth, Y President for most of the 1880s

Left: A promotional brochure for the new building "to be occupied September, 1883"



Bay's potential and undertook the task of reclaiming it from the sea, beginning at Arlington Street and proceeding westward. Residential and institutional construction followed apace, creating an entirely new section of Boston, affluent and fashionable. More important, it was accessible: before choosing a site, the Y had taken a census of current members and found that the majority lived in the West or South Ends, both of which were closer to Back Bay than downtown.⁶ The Institute of Technology (later renamed MIT), the Natural History Society, the Boston Art Club, the new Boston Public Library, the Harvard Medical School, and Trinity Church would neighbor the Association's new location. The YMCA's new location, exulted the Committee on Building, "promises to be the principal center of the societies and institutions of the city."⁷

The new building opened in 1883 at the corner of Boylston and Berkeley Streets.



Construction got under way, and in 1883 the Association's new facility was completed. Located at the corner of Boylston and Berkeley Streets, the new building was the creation of architects Sturgis and Brigham. The Queen Anne design was five stories high, its pressed brick and brownstone foundation and trimmings harmonizing well with its Back Bay neighbors. A central reception room, general business office, secretary's private office, parlors, library, reading room, amusement room, and parcel room were located on the first floor, with a gymnasium one floor below and classrooms one floor above. The gymnasium had an elevated track, with nearby locker rooms. The third floor contained two halls, one large and one small, to accommodate audiences of up to one thousand. The edifice was impressive—a symbol of the Boston Y's newfound stability and status.⁸

A New Constitution for a New Era

The inclusive attitude that the Y demonstrated in the branch-building of the 1880s found expression on a policy level as well. This official reorientation occurred after a major change in management. In 1887, after holding the position of General Secretary for 14 years, M. R. Deming left the Y to undertake “special evangelistic work.”⁹ He was to be the last leader—after Rowland and Sturgis—who believed that the Y's primary purpose was evangelism. His successor was Walter C. Douglas, who subscribed to Woodworth's view of the Boston Y as “comprehensive in its work, practical in its methods, and catholic in its spirit.”¹⁰

Under Woodworth's and Douglas's guidance, the Boston Y adopted a new constitution in the spring of 1888, with two reforms standing out as most important. First, the new constitution revamped the Y's mission. Adopting the Fourfold Program, first developed by the New York YMCA in 1866, the Boston Association pledged to work for “the spiritual, intellectual, physical, and social improvement of young men.” The Fourfold Program represented a significant shift in the Y's approach to young men, with character-building replacing evangelism as the primary focus. The religious

1888

The Y adopts a new constitution broadening its purpose and opening up membership to men of all religious backgrounds.



**The Y now
was open to
all the young
men of Boston,
Christian and
non-Christian
alike ...**

mission still played a role, but to a lesser degree. In the past, the Y had said its work was to “bring young men to Christ.” Now, by contrast, it described its work as “an attempt to control the organized social life of young men with Christian influences.”¹¹ This approach proved a source of great pride:

*We invite the discerning young man to consider for a moment the characteristic which distinguishes the Association from evening schools, athletic and social clubs. It may be expressed in two words: “foundation material.” In the development of all-round manhood, it is self-evident that the right foundation is absolutely necessary.... This material upon which we would have you build is—sterling Christian character.*¹²

Second, the Y redefined the qualifications for membership. Although active membership still required participation in an evangelical church, no one could be excluded on the basis of religious belief.¹³ This provision was of monumental importance. The Y now was open to all the young men of Boston, Christian and non-Christian alike—the beginnings of a diversification that would be fully realized in the years ahead.

Geographical Expansion

During the 1880s, the Boston Y also launched a concerted effort to expand the organization geographically, primarily through branch formation. By creating specific branches for specific populations—immigrants, the unemployed, college students, neighborhoods, railroad workers, and members of the armed services—the Association reached out to many new communities.

The German Branch, the first branch formed in this period, was the creation of Frederick von Schluembach. A Prussian army officer, von Schluembach had emigrated to the United States during the Civil War and made a major career change, taking up evangelical work with German-Americans—“the German Moody,” he was called. After serving as Secretary of the International Committee of the YMCA of America, he went to Boston and founded the German Branch in 1880. The new branch used the Boston Y’s Boylston Street building

as its meeting place, but had its own secretary, worship services, religious meetings, concerts, and lectures. The German Branch later became part of the Boston Y.¹⁴

A branch in the downtown area soon followed. Founded in 1884, the Tremont Row Branch was located at Scollay Square (near today's Government Center), in the heart of the business district. To enable the branch to serve its constituency—disadvantaged young men looking for work—the Y moved the Employment Bureau there. Three prayer meetings were held every day, starting in the morning before the bureau opened:

*Hundreds of young men in this large city, wandering up and down without friends, with no one to look to for help or sympathy, seeking in vain for some employment, have found this morning meeting a great stimulus and help to overcome the strong temptations that would lead them from the path of rectitude and virtue, and plunge them into crime.*¹⁵

Attendance at meetings in a given month ranged from approximately 1,600 to twice that number—proof that the branch was addressing an unmet demand.¹⁶ In 1888, however, it suddenly came to an end when the lease expired and the director resigned.

The Boston Intercollegiate YMCA was formed in 1888. At the forefront of this effort was Luther D. Wishard, a Princeton student in the 1870s who had led the formation of an intercollegiate YMCA movement. The Intercollegiate Y had representatives at eight colleges: Harvard Medical School, MIT, Boston University schools of law, medicine, theology, and liberal arts, Boston Dental College, and Newton Theological Seminary. Like the German Branch, it used the Boylston Street building as its headquarters. In the mid-1890s, individual college associations were formed at MIT, Boston University's College of Liberal Arts, Medical School, and Law School, and Harvard Medical School. (Associations would eventually also be formed at Boston University School of Theology, Harvard Law School, Tufts medical and dental schools, and the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy).¹⁷

67 Joh. 22: 17. 65 Luc. 21: 33-36.

Versammlungen

Veranstalter von dem

Deutschen Zweig der B. Y. M. C. A.

Ecke der Eliot und Tremont Straßen.

Der Deutsche Evangelist,

F. von SCHLUEMBACH,

mit in der

Deutschen Methodistischen Kirche,

an der Shawmut Ave. (No 777).

Predigen

Dienstag, Mittwoch, Donnerstag u. Freitag,

FEBRUAR 1, 2, 3 und 4,

um 8 Uhr Abends.

Jedermann Willkommen! Bitte Kei! Keine Collegien!

(Die bei diesen Versammlungen zum Gebrauch kommenden Lieder sind unter dem Titel „Große Betschrift in Liedern,“ a 10 cts., bei den Vereinsmitgliedern zu haben.)

A notice for a lecture by Frederick von Schluembach at the German Branch

1892

Frederick Law Olmsted designs Jamaica Park in his "Emerald Necklace," a system of nine parks and parkways to beautify the city of Boston.





During the late nineteenth century, the Boston Y also made attempts to form neighborhood branches, but these attempts proved less successful. In 1891, the Charlestown Y, an independent Association formed a few years earlier, merged as a branch. Troublesome finances, however, forced the Charlestown Branch to close in 1904.¹⁸ (It would later be replaced by branches for Navy and Army personnel, which opened in Charlestown in 1909 and 1912, respectively.¹⁹) In South Boston and Roxbury, interest was sufficient during the early 1890s but finances were not. The depression that began in 1893 and lasted for four years put any further thoughts of branch-building on hold.

The new century witnessed the founding of the Boston & Maine and the Chinese branches. The Boston & Maine Branch opened in 1901, the 102nd railroad branch formed nationwide. Heavily subsidized by the Boston & Maine Railroad—it furnished the building, oak furniture, light, heat, and water, and pictures of scenery of Boston and Maine for the walls—this branch provided a haven for transient railroad workers. At the same time, it offered rail workers an environment designed

Rooms in the Boston & Maine Branch, from top to bottom: social room, dormitory, employment bureau, reading room, lunch counter, and menu for the “regular bill of fare served for dinner, 11 AM–3 PM”

- | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Clam Chowder, 5. | Soups. | Mulligatawny, 5. |
| Salt Fish in Cream, 15. | Fish, Meats, Entrees, etc. | Broiled Salmon, Cream Sauce, 20. |
| Roast Beef, dish gravy, 20. | | Beef Steak Pie, 15. |
| Fricassee of Tripe and Oysters on Toast, 15. | | Frankforts and Potato Salad, 15. |
| Minced Lamb on Toast, 15. | | Cocoanut Fritters, 10. |
| | Vegetables. | |
| Boiled and Mashed Potatoes, 5. | | Squash, 5. |
| Celery, 5. | | Cabbage, 5. |
| Picked Beets, 5. | | Green Peas, 5. |
| | Dessert | |
| Pies, 5c. — Apple, Prune, Squash, Blueberry, Cocoanut Custard. | | |
| PUDDINGS, 5. — Baked Indian, Custard. | | |



Boston & Maine Railroad Branch YMCA,
160 Beverly Street

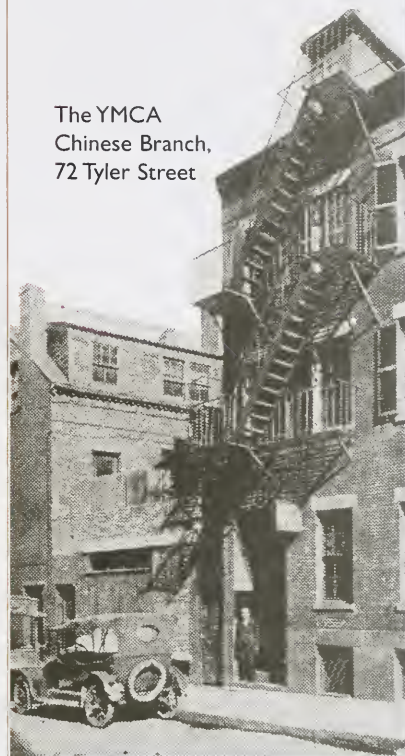
to make them “good Christian men” and, in a period that saw much labor unrest, more loyal employees. Housed in a former freight station near North Union Station, the branch’s three floors contained a reception room, reading room, marble bathrooms, bowling alley, dormitory of 30 beds, and dining room.²⁰

In the spring of 1914, the Chinese Branch was founded when the Christian Chinamen of Greater Boston petitioned the Boston Y for branch status. Located on Tyler Street in Boston, the Chinese Y was home to the Chinese Boy Scouts, student organizations, and family activities. Over the course of the century, the South Cove Branch, as it was later named, proved a lasting fixture in the Boston Chinese community.²¹ In 2000, it would open permanent state-of-the-art facilities.²²

The Great Outdoors

The expansion efforts that marked the Boston Y’s work in the late nineteenth century were evident on a programmatic level as well. Eager to expand the physical education program that had proved so popular a decade earlier, the Y hired a medical director and an examiner to prescribe training and give advice regarding bathing, diet, and other health-related matters. In addition, it sponsored monthly exhibitions of body-building and lectures by physicians. Gymnasium membership rose from 653 in 1882 to 854 in 1888.²³

At the same time, the program moved outdoors. The idea of the outdoor program was conceived in 1879, when the Y rented outdoor space in City Point, South Boston. The “Open Air Gymnasium,” as it was called, originally featured a track, baseball diamond, and “houses...containing dressing rooms and furnished with necessary appliances.”²⁴ Later it acquired a



The YMCA
Chinese Branch,
72 Tyler Street

1895

George W. Mehaffey becomes General Secretary of the Boston YMCA.

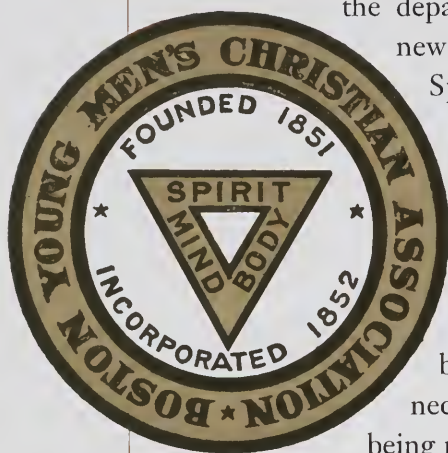


cricket field, 10 tennis courts, and a grandstand holding 3,000, and the Y organized a program of competitive games, the “Open Air Athletic Society.” During the 1880s, the Association would develop a team sports program, with Y teams competing against colleges and other Ys.

Official recognition of the importance of physical education came in 1891, when Luther Gulick, a physician and chair of the department of physical education at the new Y “School for Christian Workers” in Springfield (later the International YMCA Training School and then Springfield College), developed a new logo, a red triangle with “spirit,” “mind,” and “body” written on its three sides. This symbol, he said, represented “man’s essential unity, body, mind, and spirit, each being a necessary and eternal part of man, he being neither one alone.”²⁵

The Y’s growing interest in physical education coincided with another trend evident in this period, the increase in the number of city dwellers taking summer vacations in the country and the corresponding rise in popularity of organized camping. To provide a place for boys to get physical exercise in a nonurban setting, the New York Association established the first YMCA summer camp in 1884. Fifteen years later, the Boston Y followed suit. Purchasing Sandy Island, located on Lake Winnepesaukee, New Hampshire, the Y founded Camp Buena Vista (later renamed Sandy Island Camp). The two-week-long camp, intended for young men with low incomes and little vacation time, cost \$15, which included travel from Boston. Open to any Y member in good standing 15 years and older, it provided accommodations for 50 campers and featured rowing, swimming, and horseshoe pitching. The first year proved so successful that in 1900 the Y bought the island for \$2,000. By World War I, the camp boasted a capacity of more than 100.²⁶

Logo
from the
1915–1916
Annual
Report



Camp Buena Vista on
Sandy Island, 1901



An Educational Revolution in Boston

The expansion of Y programs that began in the 1880s continued the following decade, although with a major shift in emphasis from physical education to its academic counterpart—the “intellectual” component of the Fourfold Program. This effort did not happen in a vacuum. The late nineteenth century was a period of tremendous growth in higher education that included the founding of private universities such as Stanford and the University of Chicago. For those who could not afford the luxury of a private day education, the void was filled by a number of respectable night schools: Cooper Union and Pratt Institute in New York, and Drexel Institute of Art, Science, and Industry in Philadelphia.

Alert to these developments, the Boston YMCA took action. In 1895, newly appointed General Secretary George W. Mehaffey led an extensive reorganization of the educational program, now renamed the “Evening Institute of the Boston Young Men’s Christian Association.” To run this new program, he employed a professional educational director in 1896 for the first time in the Y’s history. Frank Palmer Speare was well qualified for the position. The son of a Quincy shipbuilder, Speare had led a career as a principal of a public high school, a teacher in a private prep school, and the director of a municipal evening school. He then taught English in the Y’s evening class while pursuing graduate work at Harvard.

Speare recognized that a great gap existed in higher education. After the Civil War, many colleges and universities were founded to meet growing demand, and Boston followed this trend: the New England Conservatory of Music, the Massachusetts School of Art, Radcliffe, Boston University, Boston College, MIT, and Wellesley College joined the ranks of Harvard and Tufts. However, these institutions were for those who could afford them.²⁷ During the economic depression of the 1890s, it became even more important to provide for young men currently outside the educational system, those who could not afford college tuition and who worked during the day.

1898

Boston constructs the nation’s first subway under Tremont Street.



Frank Palmer Speare



From top to bottom:
Typewriting class, class in
mechanical design, and
second-year law class

It is easy to see the immense importance of the educational work which is being done by the Association, and in which the Boston Association is taking a leading part. The costs to these young men must of necessity be moderate, for it is a lack of means that forces most of them so early into a business life; hence, to charge the young men a sufficiently large fee to cover all expenses of the work would exclude most of them. The sons of the rich who go to Harvard and Yale do not pay the full costs. Why should we expect the boys of our own city who are poor to do it?... Our Association, of course, does not aim to give the young men an elaborate literary and scientific education, but they are receiving practical training along many lines of every-day life, and are being helped besides physically, socially, and spiritually.²⁸

With this mission in mind, Speare enacted reforms as varied as they were numerous. He made classes smaller and more personal, required detailed reports from teachers on class attendance and progress, and established exams at set times. He also expanded the course list significantly, developing over time a broad spectrum of courses to meet a wide range of interests. In addition to forming elementary and high school departments, Speare created specialized departments: civil service, industrial, architecture, engineering, marine architecture, arts, music, languages, and law. From the Evening Institute's earliest days, most students took several courses around a certain goal rather than one or two courses. It was, in Speare's words, "the great workingman's college." Such was the genesis of one of Boston's great academic institutions, Northeastern University.²⁹

The following decade saw important additions to the Evening Institute's curriculum, additions that reflected major changes in American society and technology. In 1903, the year Henry Ford sold his first Model A, the Institute offered its first



Students examining a car at the Automobile School

automobile engineering course. It was not long before one course evolved into the Automobile School, the first of its kind in the country. Pioneered by W. C. Hosford, the school grew quickly with the acquisition of several cars and space in a garage. Every faculty member was a graduate of the school. Speare sent a postcard to prospective applicants that extolled the practicality of the new school:

*Now is the time to prepare for the Automobile Industry in any of its branches. There has never been a time in the history of the trade when there was so much activity or so many openings for good men. Repair men, garage men, operators and demonstrators are all in demand, and the opportunities are most attractive.*³⁰

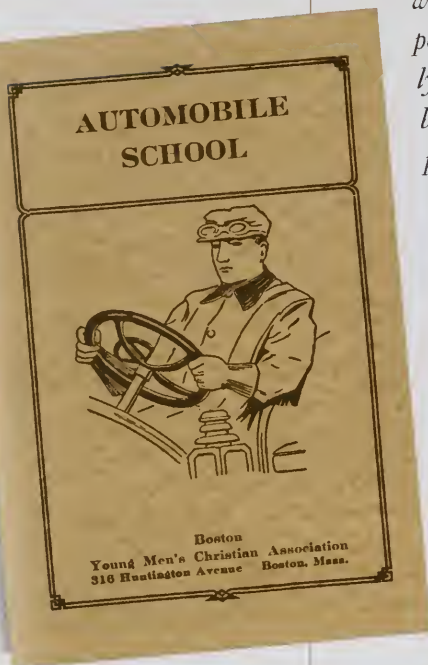
The Automobile School, later renamed the Vocational Institute, filled an important need. Courses included “Chauffeurs’ and Operators’ Lecture Course: Pleasure Cars or Motor Trucks”; “Chauffeurs’ and Operators’ Laboratory Course: Pleasure Cars or Motor Trucks”; “Chauffeurs’ and Operators’ Road Course: Pleasure Cars or Motor Trucks”; and a “Garage Course.”³¹

The chauffeur occupies a position very similar to that of the locomotive engineer. His function is to drive with care, make adjustments, know when his machine needs important repairs, and see that they are made; in other words, to operate his car

1903

The Evening Institute offers its first automobile engineering course.





Catalog of the
Automobile School

with efficiency and the greatest possible economy. He is supposed to be a skillful, well-trained, competent, gentlemanly, respectful employee, who not only knows his business, but his place, and where he fits into the transportation problem. All of these points, mechanical, social and economic, are presented in the well-conducted automobile school, and as a result, the chauffeur knows his profession, and is alert to the responsibilities and requirements, and is prepared to meet them.... The chauffeur should... seek to be an indispensable adjunct to every refined American home which can afford the luxury of a motor car; or if in commercial lines, he should strive to make himself a thorough master of the requirements and economic conditions of the industry, and be an important factor in it. This high conception of the automobile industry and the function of the chauffeur and repair man make attendance at a well-conducted automobile school indispensable, and it is these features which are prominent in the work of the Automobile School of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association.³²

The Automobile School was not the Evening Institute's only innovation in the early years of the new century. Following the example set by universities, in 1904 the Association Institute developed what it termed "university basis," a structure that grouped departments into four schools: General, Preparatory, Evening Polytechnic, and Law. In 1908, the Evening Institute established the School of Commerce and Finance.

The development with the greatest impact came in 1909, when the Association Institute launched two day schools, the Day School of Co-operative Engineering and the Association Day School. Employing

YMCA Automobile and
Electrical School on
Harcourt Street



a model set by the University of Cincinnati three years earlier, the program of the Day School of Co-operative Engineering (later renamed the School of Engineering) combined alternate periods of study with periods of full-time professional employment related to the student's academic and career interests. "The aim of this School," the brochure read, "is to give the student a thorough technical training along Engineering lines, and at the same time to give him the practical experience in his profession which will prove invaluable in his life work."³³ To this end, the students worked in pairs, shifting between the school and their practical employment on alternate weeks.³⁴ The Day School of Co-operative Engineering proved an instant success with Institute students—and over time developed into the practice-oriented education that distinguishes Northeastern University today.

The Association Day School, later renamed the Huntington School for Boys, was a not-for-profit preparatory school that provided private school features for a much lower tuition than the typical private school. The launching of the two day schools, both attended by full-time students, prompted the Y to change the name of the Evening Institute to "Association Institute."³⁵

Because of Frank Palmer Speare's effort, the Y's educational program flourished. This success meant growth for the Boston Y as a whole: a survey revealed that 40 percent of its members were especially interested in the Evening Institute and 25 percent in the gymnasium. As the number of students increased, so did the need for larger facilities.

Building a Permanent Home

Anticipating this development, the Association had already laid the financial groundwork for a new building. In 1900, the Y launched a major fundraising effort, and soon afterwards, purchased a lot in the Back Bay, at Arlington and Newbury Streets, on the present site of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. Later in the decade, the prominent architectural firm, Shepley Rutan and Coolidge, known as Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott today, began drafting a design.

1905

John F. Fitzgerald, grandfather of future president John Fitzgerald Kennedy, becomes the first Boston-born Irish Catholic to be elected mayor of Boston.



Huntington School
Mandolin Club

In January 1910, a fire unexpectedly destroyed the Boylston Street building, leaving the Y without a location.

In January 1910, a fire unexpectedly destroyed the Boylston Street building, leaving the Y without a location. Forced to rent meager quarters in two locations, the Association put its Educational Department at 93 Massachusetts Avenue and its administrative, social, and employment headquarters at 246 Huntington Avenue. Membership dropped 20 percent. The proposed Arlington Street building no longer seemed financially feasible. Abandoning this plan, the Y sold the lot and purchased a site on Huntington Avenue in the Fenway, an area west of Back Bay that similarly was filled marshland. In doing so, it followed the path of many Boston cultural and educational institutions that, beginning in the 1890s, had moved out of central Boston to take advantage of the newly available land—prominent institutions like Symphony Hall, the New England Conservatory of Music, and the Museum of Fine Arts.³⁶

With a new site secured, the Y started the building project anew. Shepley Rutan and Coolidge produced a new design, and construction began. The main building would be located at 316 Huntington Avenue, between the New England Conservatory of Music and the Boston Red Sox' first ball park, which would later be the site of the Northeastern University campus. (A separate vocational building situated behind the main building, on St. Botolph Street, was completed first.) Mayor John Fitzgerald and other leaders of the Boston community were among the five thousand people present when President William Howard Taft laid the cornerstone on October 2, 1912. "Ladies and Gentlemen of Boston," he said,

I congratulate you on the completion, or near completion, of this great building. It has been my good fortune for one reason or another to be called in on occasions like this to exercise the art of the Mason in laying the corner stone of buildings of the Young Men's Christian Association the world over....The Young Men's Christian Association is a great Christian club where the hours of leisure of the young men of the community, who are denied, in many instances, the many opportunities for home surroundings, may go and enjoy themselves with the certainty that everything about them and all their environment will tend upward and not downward....When I speak of the



President Taft laying the cornerstone for the Huntington Avenue building

Young Men's Christian Association I beg you to believe me and trust it as one of the great elevating institutions of the Christian world... The Young Men's Christian Association is non-sectarian in its character, and the secretaries are trained in the whole Association as teachers so that when a man accepts benefit from it he does not feel that he is lowered in his dignity in the acceptance of some charity thrown to the unfortunate, but that he is enjoying something that is established as schools are established for the benefit of the entire community, and that he, therefore, has a right to be grateful to the entire community for what comes to him... I have only brought these instances before you to show the real benefit in the community that a Young Men's Christian Association does, and the very important epoch in the history of Boston that the opening of this building ought to constitute and the reasons why Bostonians, happy as they are in what they have, ought to again felicitate themselves on a new reason of being proud of real Boston.³⁷

The building opened in 1913.

1912

An independent YMCA for the Army opens in Charlestown.



The building's vestibule, lobby, and reception hall were richly finished, with lavish paneling, pilasters, and other decorative elements that still elicit admiration today.

The lobby of the Huntington Avenue building

Like many buildings in the Fenway and Back Bay, the Huntington Avenue facility sat on filled land with a concrete foundation set on thirty-foot wood piles. In Classical Revival style executed in brick, the building consists of three connected blocks, identified on the original plans as the Administration Building, the Educational Building, and the Gymnasium Building.

The original Administration Building had a main entry vestibule leading to a lobby, and a large, two-story reception hall. The building's vestibule, lobby, and reception hall were richly finished, with lavish paneling, pilasters, and other decorative elements that still elicit admiration today. These public spaces led to offices, game rooms, a billiard room, spa, and social rooms. From the west entry, one entered a lobby with an auditorium occupying the east end of the building, named in honor of Jacob Bates, who chaired the capital campaign that made the building possible. The upper stories contained dormitory space to accommodate 300 residents, a feature not present in the Boylston Street structure. It would prove an important source of revenue in the years to come.





The Educational Building included small offices and meeting rooms, a boy's hall, and rooms for reading, games, and pool. The Gymnasium Building featured the Boston Y's first swimming pool, three handball courts, an exercise room, locker rooms, toilets, and a massage room. These facilities represented a major improvement over those of the Boylston Street building and reflected the Association's enhanced commitment to physical fitness.

Visitors to the area found the building easily: a large "YMCA" illuminated by small bulbs sat diagonally on the north corner of the roof, while large metal YMCA letters were positioned vertically on the southwest façade. In recognition of the excellence of its architectural design, the Huntington Avenue complex was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1998.

The new facilities allowed for expansion of the Association's various programs. One immediate beneficiary was the Boys' Division, a program formed in the 1880s. Since that time, interest in boys' welfare had grown markedly, as evidenced by the founding of the Federated Boys' Club (later the Boys' Club) and the Boy Scouts of America. In the early twentieth



Top: A gymnasium class poses for the camera.

Above: A wrestling team.

1912

Fenway Park, one of the oldest baseball parks in Major League Baseball, is built for the Boston Red Sox.





Boys' Entrance,
320 Huntington Avenue,
from a 1913
Fall Announcement
catalog

century, the Boys' Division in fact played a prominent role in the Boys Scout movement, sponsoring the first Boston troop in 1910.³⁸ The move to Huntington Avenue allocated space to the boys at 320 Huntington Avenue, in the Gymnasium Building. The Y could now give them the attention they needed.³⁹

Open to "any boy 12 years of age or over of good character, regardless of religious belief," the new and improved Boys' Division comprised three age groups: "younger school boys," "older school boys," and "business boys." The annual membership fee was \$2 with separate charges for use of the gym and "swimming tank." "Gymnasium clothes and towels," the brochure stated, "are kept clean and sterilized without extra charge." Boys took part in regular gymnastic work as well as all branches of indoor and outdoor sports. Fifty of the Y's new 265 dormitory rooms were allocated to boys under 21. Instruction was offered in all branches from grammar school grades through university.⁴⁰

The expansion of programs like the Boys' Division was well timed—and well received. In the first year of the new building's existence alone, the number of members jumped from 4,384 to 6,716, leading the Y to claim that it had the largest membership of any single Association building in the world.⁴¹ Approximately 50 percent of the membership lived in Boston, 30 percent in the metropolitan district of greater Boston, and 21 percent outside of an eight-mile zone. Nearly 80 percent were American-born, while 17 percent were foreign-born. Sixty-seven percent were Protestant, 15 percent Catholic, and 5 percent Jewish.⁴²

To cope with the demands of the enlarged membership and facilities, the Y created a Business Department and the position of Business Secretary, responsible for ordering supplies, preparing annual budgets, and appropriating monthly allotments to the Association's various departments.⁴³ The new

department represented another step in the professionalization of the Association's staff and, even more important, the recognition that financial health was a top priority.



In many respects, the Huntington Avenue building represented the culmination of all that the city of Boston and the Boston YMCA had experienced in the late nineteenth century. As Boston grew into a large metropolis with cultural and educational institutions serving the urban population, so the Boston YMCA grew into a large organization with programs serving young men. Through physical, geographical, numerical, programmatic, administrative, and financial growth, the Association greatly enhanced its ability to serve its constituency. With the completion of the Huntington Avenue building, the major pieces were in place: solid programs in education, physical education, and boys' work, all of which would grow in the future. Located on an avenue with Boston's most prominent cultural institutions, the new building symbolized the Y's stature in the city.

1913

The new headquarters devotes one wing, 320 Huntington, to the Boys' Division.



The YMCA on
Huntington Avenue



1914–1965

1916

Boston Y renames Association Institute "Northeastern College of the Boston YMCA"



1917

Frank Palmer Speare becomes Northeastern's first president



1918

The Boston Y launches a Student Army Training Corps Unit in support of the United States in World War I

1937

New constitution opens doors to women and different races and ethnicities



CHAPTER THREE

Years of Growth, 1914–1965

1938

Creation
of Y Boys
Associates

1951

Boston YMCA
celebrates 100th
anniversary

1952

Allston-Brighton
Branch is
founded

1962

Rapprochement
between the
Boston YMCA
and the
Catholic
Church

1965

Roxbury
Branch
is established



The completion of the Huntington Avenue building ushered in a new era in the history of the Y. It was a period of time marked by great events—World War I, the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War—the “American century,” when the United States assumed its place as world leader. The Boston YMCA’s programs and initiatives reflected the times. In the course of dealing with the crises each phenomenon brought, the Association adapted and expanded its programs and services to meet the needs of a city that was growing geographically, ethnically, and racially. At the same time, the Y fundamentally redefined its mission, shifting its emphasis from building character to building the citizens and leaders of tomorrow.

Northeastern University Comes of Age

The years before the United States’ entry into World War I represented a major milestone in the development of the Boston Y’s educational program. In 1916, the YMCA formed a separate corporation for the Association Institute and renamed it “Northeastern College of the Boston Young Men’s Christian Association,” establishing it as an independent entity.



Frank Palmer Speare,
first president of
Northeastern College

The following year, Northeastern named Frank Palmer Speare its first president. The college was governed by a board of trustees, composed of the directors of the Boston YMCA, and an executive council, composed of Speare, Galen D. Light, and the deans of each school. At this time, the college consisted of the Evening Law School, School of Commerce and Finance, and the Co-operative School of Engineering. The School of Business, Evening Preparatory School, the Huntington School, and Automobile School were affiliated schools. Northeastern did not have the authority to grant degrees at this time.¹

In 1922, Northeastern College was renamed "Northeastern University of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association." A year later, Northeastern was authorized to grant bachelor's and some graduate degrees. By 1935, the university granted all except medical and dental degrees. That same year, Northeastern obtained permission from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to eliminate the words "of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association" from its name. The final step would come in 1948, when Northeastern changed its bylaws, thus establishing itself as an institution completely independent of the Boston YMCA.²



YMCA Automobile School
logo, 1912



Northeastern College
logo, 1918



Northeastern University
logo, 1930

The Great War: An Opportunity for Service

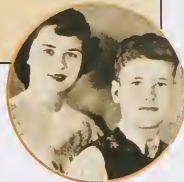
When the United States entered World War I in early April 1917, YMCAs nationwide were ready, willing, and able to join in the fight. A few days later, the Associations of America, a modern version of the U.S. Commission, met in Garden City, New York, to form the National War Work Council.

The Boston Y also rose to the challenge. As its members signed up to serve their country, the Association reoriented its services to support American troops:

Never in the history of the Young Men's Christian Association has it faced such opportunities for service....Never has it risen more nobly to the needs of our country...as the Allied nations of the world are engaged in a titanic struggle to overthrow militarism and establish for all time and for all mankind civil liberty,...we find the Association ministering, more largely than ever, to the needs of men and boys, whether in the cities, the factories, the cantonments or on the battlefields of Europe, and being entrusted with millions of dollars for the carrying on of this stupendous work.³

1919

On April 24, people throng the streets to greet the Yankee Division returning home victorious from World War I.



Hostess night for service men, Boston YMCA, 1918



Hut on Boston
Common for
Army and
Navy men



The Y devoted resources, both fundraising and programs, to the war effort. Working enthusiastically on behalf of the War Work Council, the Association helped to raise \$7 million through three campaigns. At the same time, it established a Service Men's Department, which provided free membership and entertainment for enlisted servicemen. The Huntington School became a site for military drills, while Camp Buena Vista provided a physical fitness program.⁴ In 1917, the Army-Navy YMCA was founded in Charlestown as an independent unit of the national Army and Navy programs.

With its educational facilities left greatly diminished by the departure of students for the armed services, the Boston YMCA launched a war program that featured a Student Army Training Corps unit (S.A.T.C.) in the engineering department of Northeastern College. Courses included ground mechanics for the Airplane Service and an enlarged Automobile curriculum. Both men and women participated in the program, which trained specialists in ignition, motors, and rear axle repairs, as well as radio, navigation, and map reading. The Y constructed barracks and a mess hall for the S.A.T.C. and an engine house for the Airplane School. "Our unit," the Association proudly declared, "was pronounced one of the best in New England."⁵

During the war, the Y did not launch any significant new civilian programs, preferring to continue its existing programs

on a much-reduced scale, with a change in emphasis that reflected the times. Social work, for example, focused less on entertainment, receptions, and membership promotion and more on “individual work with individuals”—runaway boys, young men in distress, and others looking for accommodations or employment. The Industrial Department, shortly before the war, provided noon mass meetings, and individual services for employees and managers at industrial plants in the Boston area. Participating companies included the Sturevant Blower Company, with 3,000 participants, Hunt-Spiller Foundry Shop, with 450, and the Rivette Lathe Company, with 200.⁶

After the armistice, the Boston Y played a vital role in answering the demands of demobilization. As veterans returned to civilian life, the Association helped many find jobs through its Employment Bureau. Others used Y-generated funds for studying at Northeastern and elsewhere.



Hunt-Spiller Foundry Shop
meeting, 1919

The Roaring Twenties

In the years following World War I, Americans refocused their attention on national issues. An economy floundering in deep recession soon gave way to boom times, as industrial production accelerated. The stock market reached new heights, and mass affluence became a reality for the first time. A vast array of social developments—Prohibition, the women’s movement, and heightened xenophobia—made an impact as well.⁷

Like other organizations across the country, the Boston YMCA responded to these social and economic changes. Although the Association continued to view the building of character as its central mission during the 1920s, the means of achieving that purpose changed markedly. In a period that witnessed the growth of service clubs like Rotary and Kiwanis and an increasing focus on building community, so too the Boston Y placed greater emphasis on community involvement.

1920

The Boston Y adopts the “Metropolitan Organization” to further ties with local communities.





Wilman E. Adams became General Secretary in 1919.

In 1919, the Association founded the Dorchester Center Community Branch.

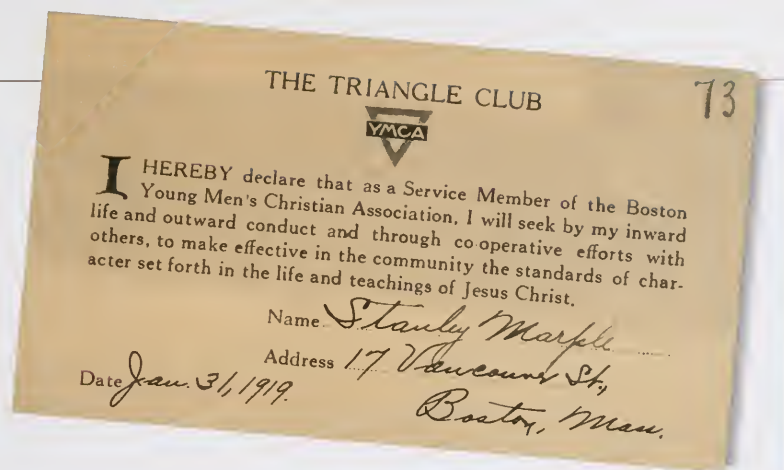
The man responsible for this change in direction was Wilman E. Adams, who succeeded Mehaffey as General Secretary of the Boston Y in 1919 and who provided guidance and leadership for the Y during this pivotal period. As a result of centralization of the Association's services in the Huntington Avenue building and the growth in the size of the city, he later wrote,

*The Association has come gradually to be isolated from those intimate contacts with churches, homes, schools, industries and municipal officials dealing with boys and young men that are essential to any adequate community program for youth. The effect of this isolation has been to limit the splendid service along the lines of physical training, health education, vocational guidance and character that has always been one of the Association's most successful achievements in other cities.*⁸

The Y needed to expand its services beyond the Huntington Avenue building, which stood at capacity, serving those members living within a 1½ mile radius. The solution was to establish branches and activity centers in residential areas where there was an unmet demand. Founded in 1914, the Chinatown Branch had proved a great success. The next step was to move into annexed suburbs such as Brighton, Charlestown, Dorchester, and West Roxbury.⁹

In 1919, the Association founded the Dorchester Center Community Branch. Because the severe postwar recession made the construction or purchase of a building financially unfeasible, the new branch was housed in rented quarters—more like the Y in its early years than the branches founded in recent decades. In the winter of 1928–1929, the Greenwood Church Community House hosted the branch. Although it did not have a building of its own, it provided members with many of the facilities of more established branch Ys: a gymnasium, club and game rooms, bowling alleys, and a basketball league. The Dorchester Center Community Branch (later shortened to Dorchester Branch) found immediate and strong support from the local community—parents, teachers, and church leaders—proving that people and programs, not buildings, were what mattered.¹⁰

The success of the Dorchester effort spurred the Boston Y to develop its branch concept further. In addition to launching



The Triangle Club was one of many clubs founded in the 1920s.

new sites, officials realized the Association needed to change the way branches, old and new, operated. No longer individual units isolated from one another, they would be part of a coordinated system.

Calling for closer ties with neighboring communities, the Association adopted in 1920 the so-called Metropolitan Organization used by YMCAs elsewhere. Branches in the system included Boston & Maine Railroad, Camping and Outdoor Recreation, Chinese, City Square, Dorchester Center Community, and Huntington Avenue. (Northeastern University and Army and Navy were not part of the metropolitan organization, but were “affiliated branches.”)

Each branch of the Metropolitan Organization had its own Board of Managers and Branch Council, while a citywide Board of Directors provided a centralized authority. At the same time, the Huntington Avenue unit lost its status as the “central Association,” becoming a cooperative branch like all the others. With the Metropolitan Organization, the Association hoped to prevent the development of independent Ys and maintain the unity of the organization, improve the management of each branch, offer a wider array of services, and garner public support throughout the city.

Different branches provided different kinds of programs. The Huntington Avenue Branch, for example, offered a full program for youth and young adults, while other branches provided a particular service, such as the Camping and Outdoor Recreation Branch.

The economic prosperity of the 1920s enabled the Boston Y to bring an independent YMCA into the

1922

James Michael Curley wins a second term as mayor and builds social, medical, and recreational facilities for the city's less advantaged.



The schedule of events at the Huntington Branch, 1924–1925



organization. Founded in 1885, the Hyde Park YMCA had recently experienced financial difficulties and became inactive. The Boston Y assumed control, making Hyde Park an Association branch in the spring of 1929.¹¹

During the 1920s, the Y also expanded the camping program in significant ways. In 1922, the Association purchased a site on Monponsett Pond near Halifax, Massachusetts, and founded Camp Ousamequin, a low-cost camp for boys. The following year, Camp Dorchester in the Blue Hills was established—known today as the Ponkapoag Outdoor Center, a day camp that serves children from the city of Boston and surrounding communities. (Camp Dee, Dorchester's sister camp, would be founded 15 years later.) In 1929, the Y established North Woods Camp on the shore of Lake Winnepesaukee. Featuring more elaborate facilities than those of Ousamequin, it was one of the first high-end resident campsites.

Important changes in the employment program, a hallmark of the Boston YMCA since its founding in 1851, also occurred in this period. Deeming it critical not simply to place men in jobs but also to advise them on the job that was right for them, in 1922 the Huntington Avenue Branch replaced the old Employment Bureau with the Vocational Guidance Department.¹² Unlike its predecessor, the new department offered a vocational and aptitude-testing program to guide the men in their choice of careers.

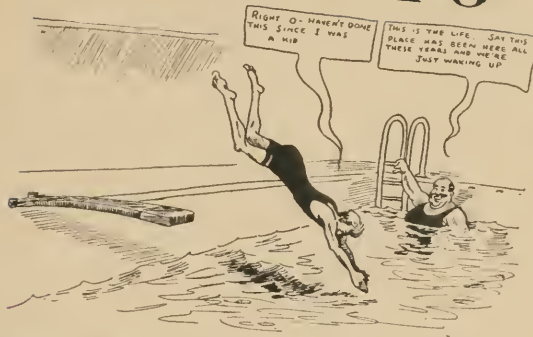
Membership, too, underwent expansion. Eager to keep up with the growth of corporate America, the Association added another tier to its program, the Business Men's Club. As the director of membership explained in 1926,

*Business today operates at high tension and men's nerves and vital organs are constantly put to "endurance tests." Business men are therefore giving increased attention to the recreation that provides the relaxation and exercise necessary to keep them in good physical condition.*¹³



Top: "The Mosquito Fleet," Camp Ousamequin, Halifax, Massachusetts, in 1936
Above: Boys show off their animals at camp

LEARN TO SWIM



Spring
Membership
3 Months \$5

EXTRA MONTHS
\$1 Each to Nov. 1

Y. M. C. A. 316 Huntington Avenue
Boston, Mass.
(OVER)

The new Business Men's Club offered to Huntington Avenue Branch members all the privileges of the other four tiers and more. In addition to access to the building's nonathletic and athletic facilities, Business Men's Club members received a special locker, shower, and club room. The annual fee for this top-of-the-line membership was \$45 for new members, \$40 for old. (The Associate Membership, the lowest tier, cost \$5.)

The captions to this 1926 postcard say "Right-O—Haven't done this since I was a kid." "This is the life. Say, this place has been here all these years and we're just waking up."

The Great Depression: Reaching Out in a Time of Retrenchment

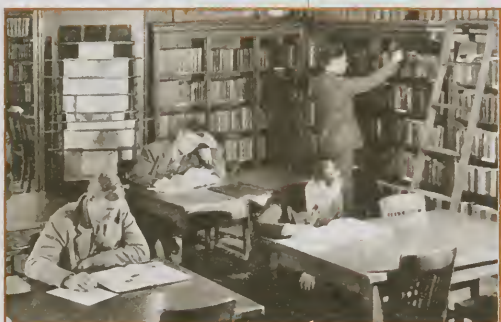
The expansion efforts of the 1920s suddenly came to a halt on Black Tuesday in October 1929, when the collapse of the stock market on Wall Street precipitated the greatest depression the country had ever experienced. Operations in key industries—auto, steel, coal, textile—came to a near halt, bank closings brought financial ruin to individuals and companies everywhere, and national unemployment surpassed 30 percent.¹⁴ As bread lines and panhandling became commonplace, the YMCA evolved into a major social welfare force in the city of Boston. Although the Depression crippled many social service organizations, the Boston Y remained active, channeling its limited resources into expanding vocational services and lessening the impact of the dire economic situation on family life.

1936

Robert T. P. Storer
becomes
President
of the
Board.



In the first years of crisis, the Y strengthened the Vocational Guidance Department:



The Y's classes in chemistry and drafting, and the library from a 1936 booklet

A vocational adjustment program with trained directors, a job counseling service—not an employment registry, but a carefully planned course of examination, testing, and training to help the individual to select his most appropriate line of activity and to find an opportunity for it. The counseling is done by a large group of business and professional men, each of whom, after special training for this work, takes a small number of young men to whom he gives personal counsel and guidance.¹⁵

As the Depression deepened, however, the emphasis came to be increasingly on the personal and less on the vocational: since work was so hard to find, the aim now was to bolster the morale of the unemployed.

The Y also played an important role in government-sponsored programs. In 1935, under the auspices of the National Youth Administration, one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal agencies, the Y took part in a cooperative program where groups of 50 unemployed young men received three months' work on N.Y.A. projects. Participants in the initiative were tested and given career advice.

Citing the devastating effects of current economic conditions, the declining role of religion, and the large percentage of families broken by divorce or death, the Boston Y stepped up its programs for boys.¹⁶ To provide facilities for this purpose, in 1935 the Y launched the City Square Civilian Branch in the same building that housed the Army-Navy YMCA in Charlestown.

In 1938, the Association expanded its youth initiative, organizing the boys' clubs on a citywide basis—which at the time



The Social Recreation
Room of the Chinese
Branch

numbered 125, with a membership totaling 2,000. The new Y Boy Associates aimed:

*To help boys to understand and evaluate the forces of democracy and of religion, and to develop a useful and happy pattern of living.*¹⁷

Dedicated to boys aged 10 to 17, the Y Boy Associates fostered the development of character through small existing groups, be it neighborhood gatherings or church groups. “Y Boys,” claimed the Association, “have been teaching each other how to live on the street and at home and at work.”¹⁸

Individual branches also launched their own programs. The Huntington Avenue Branch, for example, established the Association School in 1936.¹⁹ The school offered informal courses on modern living for men and women aged 18 to 35, with subjects ranging from marriage to current affairs.

All of these programs—N.Y.A. work, the Y Boy Associates, and the Association School—represented vital ways in which the Boston Y reached out to its constituents during the Great Depression. But by far the most significant action the Association took during these turbulent times was to revamp its qualifications for membership. In 1933, the National Council of the YMCAs voted to give local Associations control of their own membership.²⁰ For the Boston Association, the decision made it possible to cast aside gender and religious qualifications that had long proved outmoded and unsatisfactory.

Although women had engaged in Boston Association activities in varying degrees since its inception (they received



Logo for the Y Boy
Associates, late 1930s

1934

Sumner Tunnel, the
first car tunnel in
Boston, is
completed.





A dance at the
Huntington Avenue
Branch, 1936

Boston Y
track team,
1929



library privileges in 1853), their involvement did not become consequential until World War I. By the late 1930s, women were unofficial members of a number of community branches.

Religious diversification began somewhat earlier, in the early twentieth century, when immigration to the United States reached its pinnacle. During this period, thousands of Southern and Eastern Europeans, many of them Jewish or Catholic, arrived in Boston seeking a better life. They joined the Y in great numbers, as had so many immigrants in the past. In the late 1930s, Catholics composed approximately 30 percent of the membership, and Jews 20 percent.²¹

Eager to open its doors wider to these new constituencies, in 1937 the Boston Association revised its constitution. From then on, “any person” could join—a reform promoting, in Adams’s words, “religious tolerance and understanding for the purpose of serving all varieties of youth at the point of their basic needs.”²² Boys and men remained the central focus; however, women were to be included “where the program for men and boys is aided by their presence. Special programs for women and girls will be undertaken where there is a need which is not or cannot be met otherwise.”²³

It would be impossible to exaggerate the significance of the new constitution. Although it was originally intended to open the door to women and people of the Judeo-Christian

heritage, in the long term it paved the way for the truly multicultural membership that is the organization's hallmark today.²⁴

Because of financial limitations, the Boston Y undertook few projects involving construction or renovation during the Depression. There were two exceptions: the construction of the Waltham Branch in 1937 and the modification of the existing Huntington Avenue building in 1940. The latter would now function as the Association's main headquarters as well as a branch unit. (Many years later, in 1978, it would be renamed the Central Branch.) The Boys' Division became home to a library for Northeastern, and took up residence in the east wing of the building. In addition, the Y adapted its office facilities, built a new library for members, and enlarged the gymnasium.

World War II

The outbreak of World War II ushered in a period unparalleled in turmoil and devastation. As Hitler's expansion through Europe threatened American principles of democracy and freedom, the Boston YMCA's mission of character building assumed a new sense of urgency.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941—"a day that will live in infamy"—sent a shock wave through Americans nationwide. YMCAs, however, were not caught unaware. Anticipating the United States' entry into the war, the National YMCA, in conjunction with the National Jewish Welfare Board, the National Catholic Community Service, the National Traveler's Aid Association, the Salvation Army, and the National Board of the Young Women's Christian Association, had recently formed the United Service Organizations (USO). This cooperative service organization aimed to serve "the religious, spiritual, welfare and educational needs of the men and women in the armed forces and defense industries of the United States, and in general, to contribute to the maintenance of morale in American communities."²⁵



Interracial track and field event, 1946

1937

The Boston Y revises its constitution to open membership up to "any person."





"Uncle Sam Wants Strong Men" brochure highlighting the varied activities the Y offered in 1941



Similarly, the Boston Y mobilized its forces:

*We reaffirm the central Christian purpose of the Association. This purpose can be attained only by a concern for persons and for the kind of world in which they live. America's participation in the war has been undertaken to preserve a way of life that makes valid these concerns. We conceive it, therefore, to be the solemn duty of this institution to contribute every possible help toward the achievement of victory and the establishment of a sound peace.*²⁶

Following the guidelines established by the USO, the Association focused on three goals: serving the armed forces; maintaining the physical conditioning and morale of civilians; and helping those below the draft age meet current challenges and preparing them to deal with the problems of the future.²⁷

Under the leadership of President of the Board Robert T. P. Storer, who also chaired the Massachusetts USO, the Boston Y made its facilities available to servicemen, offering free membership, as it had in World War I. In 1942, it reorganized the City Square Branch and Army-Navy Association as one body, the Charlestown Armed Services YMCA.

During World War I, the Y devoted its energies almost exclusively to the war effort. By contrast, during World War II, the Y not only maintained its civilian programs but also launched new ones in Allston-Brighton, West Roxbury, and Roslindale. Relying on the facilities of nearby churches, schools, and parks, these programs provided local residents with opportunities to partake in team sports and playground activities.²⁸ Camp programs also stayed up and running. All of these enterprises stressed physical conditioning and strength as critical to success. In the words of a promotional pamphlet:

*Here's a Strength Factory with up-to-the-minute equipment utilized for all sorts of activities which will interest a red-blooded man and is well worth your inspection....The call is to serve others, and the unusual conditions under which we are living are causing many to break from their moral moorings; it takes a strong man to stand square on his feet in these unusual times. Men are finding a new meaning to the word Religion in serving their fellows and men are needed to help promote the program of service maintained by the Young Men's Christian Association.*²⁹

Postwar Expansion

After VJ Day, the United States returned to a peacetime existence. A burgeoning economy brought a rise in factory production and improved the standard of living for most Americans, while major demographic changes—the return of millions of veterans, and the growth of suburbs and attendant Baby Boom—transformed the social landscape. With this growth, however, came anxiety: Soviet influence expanded in Eastern Europe and Asia, leading the United States to assume

1945

Thousands of servicemen and women return to Boston after VJ Day.



Sandy Island Camp

the role as preserver of democracy against the spread of communism.³⁰ Sensitive to the changing tenor of the times, the Boston Y revamped its mission accordingly.

In 1946, Ray Johns succeeded Wilman Adams as General Secretary. Johns came to the Boston Association after many years of Y experience in Detroit and in the national organization; most recently, he had been Director of Operations for the USO. Julian T. Anthony, who joined the Y's Board of Directors in 1951 and went on to serve as Chairman, then Treasurer in the 1960s and 1970s, knew Johns well.

"Ray was a friendly and open person and a very solid administrator," Anthony said.

Dr. Ray Johns,
General Secretary

"He was very good at getting important people involved, people who became major contributors."³¹ Under Johns's leadership, the Boston Y focused on improving its branch presence, continuing the development of small group programs, improving cooperative relationships in the community, and embracing a broader religious philosophy.

Johns took up the reins just as veterans were returning to Boston by the thousands. The Boston Y welcomed the GIs with open arms:



Young adults, a new and growing constituency, 1946

*The Y Lobby looks like "old home week" every day now—at least to those of us who remember the good old pre-war times. At any time of the day or evening you will see old friends gathered around swapping yarns, shaking hands, introducing buddies, or just getting acquainted with the changes made at the Y itself during the past few years.... Well, fellas, you're welcome here—this is what we've been waiting for!*³¹

The Association offered some 9,000 men and women a complimentary three months' membership. In addition, it expanded the Occupational Counseling Services (previously called the Vocational Guidance Department) in the Huntington Avenue building to help veterans find a civilian

occupation. In 1946 alone, the Y placed over 5,000 men, nearly double the previous year. Membership throughout the Boston Y increased 29 percent from 1945, reaching 24,167.³³

As the need for servicemen-oriented activity declined in the late 1940s, the Boston Y refocused its attention on civilian programs.³⁴ In a period when the Cold War gained momentum and survival in the nuclear age became a central concern nationwide, the Association shifted its emphasis from building character to training youth to be good citizens and leaders in a world threatened by the growth of communism:

*The crisis in national and international life emphasizes the need for persons of high purpose. Leaders will be required who have greater curiosity for the truth and less disdain for those who differ. The future needs less neutral spectators in the contest of ideals and more participants who will stand for the right, speak for the right, act for the right. These qualities are the product of a way of life. They are attained by youth in day-by-day living. They are aspects of the group life of an Association which teaches greater reverence for God, provides opportunity for fine experiences in friendship, develops a healthy physical life, trains in skills for living and creates a higher regard for citizenship.*³⁵

The first step was to improve old facilities and build new ones. To fund an undertaking of this magnitude, in 1949 the Y launched its first campaign for capital improvements in 40 years. The campaign raised \$500,000, which paid for an enlarged gymnasium at the Hyde Park Branch and new buildings for Dorchester and West Roxbury. Both facilities, dedicated in 1951, offered family-oriented programs and services, in direct response to community needs.³⁶

In 1951, the Y's centennial year, the Association launched a \$350,000 building campaign to benefit the Huntington Avenue Branch. The funds covered the construction and



Above: The Job Hunting School for Veterans
Below: 98th Annual Report



1953

The Y launches a new railroad branch at South Station.





Archery, fencing, and gymnastics in 1959

interior furnishings of 90 residence rooms (an important source of revenue), structural changes on the first and second floors, modernization of food service delivery, and fire prevention.³⁷

During the early 1950s, the Boston Y also founded several new branches, beginning in 1952 with Allston-Brighton, housed in a former school building on Chestnut Street in Brighton.³⁸ The following year, the Association organized a new railroad YMCA branch for employees at South Station on the fifth floor of the building. The South Station Railroad Branch was unique in that its membership included men and women from nearly every state on the Eastern seaboard. Since the membership was exclusively adult, the emphasis was less on group activities and more on facilities, which included a darkroom, showers and lockers, individual roomettes, a piano, and ping-pong tables.³⁹

As prosperity gained during the 1950s, so did the Boston YMCA. Operating surpluses in the last years of the decade supported the renovation of old facilities such as Hyde Park, a new building at Allston-Brighton, and a pool at West Roxbury. Camps grew in popularity and size, leading the Y to establish a day camp at the Cabot Reservation in Waltham.

Interestingly, at a time when Americans around the country were rediscovering religion, the Boston Y was becoming an increasingly ecumenical institution—a development owing to the increasing diversification of its membership and the adoption of a broader religious philosophy. In its early days, the Y aimed to guide young men to the church of their choice, where they would receive moral instruction. Now, by contrast, the Y believed it could provide that instruction, more spiritual and less specifically Christian than in times past. While many YMCAs across the country continued to emphasize adherence to doctrine, the Boston Association believed faith in God was what mattered most.⁴⁰

New Frontiers

The early 1960s were a time of change in American society—the era of John F. Kennedy’s New Frontier, the Peace Corps, and civil rights. Under Ray Johns’s continued leadership, the Boston YMCA extended its efforts to reach out to the community ethnically, geographically, and—for the first time in a significant way—racially.

Although Catholics used the Y’s facilities in large numbers, they contravened a 1921 Papal Edict that prohibited them from using the YMCA. In 1962, Cardinal Cushing, who had previously supported the edict, had a change of heart and agreed to a meeting with Y officials. Peter Post, later President of the Y, was there. “Three or four of the cardinal’s top monsignors attended, as did the editor of the *Pilot Magazine*, and YMCA leaders from throughout New England,” he recalled. “We discovered that both the YMCA and the Roman Catholic Church had parochial views of each other, and the church had not recognized the Y’s openness and the fact that it was not proselytizing.”⁴¹ Shortly after the meeting, the Church issued a paper withdrawing its prohibition.

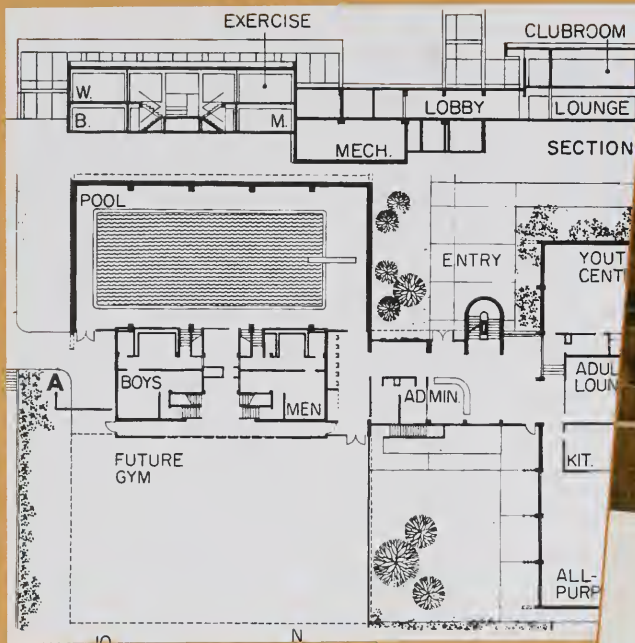
Three years later, the Boston Y took a major step in welcoming African-Americans to the organization, building a new branch in Roxbury, its first major outreach to Boston’s Black community. The Association’s interest in bringing Blacks into the membership dated to 1946, when it launched an interracial games program in the South End–Roxbury area. In 1965, as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society, the federal government created the Department of Housing and Urban Development and launched a major urban renewal program. Boston’s urban renewal effort soon got under way, and the Y joined in the initiative. With the help of The Architects Collaborative, the Association built a facility in Roxbury to provide social, athletic, and cultural programs to people of all ages.

1961

The Boston Redevelopment Authority undertakes large-scale urban renewal projects at the Prudential Center and Government Center.



Camp Dorchester, 1966



The Roxbury YMCA, designed by Howard Elkus at The Architects Collaborative, Cambridge, Massachusetts, was the cover story of the May 1966 *Architectural Record*.

The *Architectural Record* praised the 1965 complex as

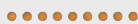
*strong and monolithic, with a finish and with forms that are much more often seen in much bigger buildings, this...YMCA was designed as much more than a community center....It brings freshness and color to an old and blighted area. In the kind of place where impermanence is common, the building's strong shapes and finishes suggest commitment.*⁴²

The Roxbury Branch would play a major role in improving race relations in the turbulent years that followed.

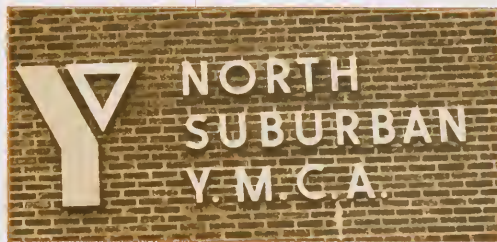
In 1965, the Boston Y reached out in another direction—to the suburbs—when the Woburn Association joined the Boston Association as a branch. This was the first acquisition of an independent Y since Hyde Park in 1929 and, notably, the first truly suburban branch brought into the Association. The Boston YMCA stood in sharp contrast with the Ys of other major cities, which tended to encompass suburban areas as well, and consequently benefited from the revenues generated by those locations. But because of the independent mindset of Yankee New England, many suburban Ys in the Boston area—Cambridge and Newton, to cite two

examples—had chosen to remain independent organizations.

Like Hyde Park, Woburn suffered from fiscal problems and viewed the merger as a means of survival. At the time of the merger, the Boston Y added a fitness component to the facilities in the belief that it would produce operating income and draw campaign support from nearby industries. This turned out to be a winning strategy: in the capital campaign of 1966, Woburn would raise the majority of the gifts, supporting both its own operations and those of the urban branches in the years to come, and providing a model for other suburban branches to follow.



In the spring of 1966, the Boston YMCA changed its name to the Greater Boston Young Men's Christian Association—a change reflecting the Y's expanding reach over both city and suburbs. The Association had grown significantly in the past 50 years. From the Great War to the Cold War, the Boston YMCA expanded and developed geographically while reaching out to all people regardless of gender, religion, or race. By 1966, the Y had achieved recognition as a pillar of community life—a role that would prove vital in the turbulent years ahead.



The Woburn Y

The Wakefield Y

1966

The Boston YMCA changes its name to the "Greater Boston YMCA."



1966–1980

1966

Solon B. Cousins
becomes General
Secretary and
General Director

1967

WHEELS
program
is launched



1969

Y founds
Dedham
Branch

1970

John E. Danielson
becomes General
Director and
President



CHAPTER FOUR

Transition amid Turbulence, 1966–1980

1971

Management
Resources
Center is
launched

1974

WHEELS
workers help
ease tensions
during busing
crisis

1975

Black Achievers
Program is
founded

1980

Needham
YMCA merges
as a branch



The late 1960s were a time of turbulence and rapid social change in the United States. President Lyndon B. Johnson, who had taken office after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, won a landslide victory over Barry Goldwater in 1964 and used his mandate to present Congress with the most sweeping legislation since the New Deal. His program for a “Great Society” created Medicare and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, funded public and private education, established standards for air and water quality, and provided support for the arts. Great Society legislation made federal funding available for a wide variety of social and urban programs.

No issue called for attention more urgently than race. In the face of stiff Republican opposition, Johnson used the national distress precipitated by President Kennedy’s assassination to push through the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Voting Rights Act followed a year later. But progress in achieving civic justice was slow. Frustrated by continued inequality, militant Blacks formed the “Black Power” movement. Starting in the Watts district of Los Angeles, riots broke out in a number of cities across the country, the last provoked by the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968.

**Responding to
the challenge,
the Greater
Boston YMCA
turned its
attention to
the inner city—
“the New
Frontier of
American
democracy.”**



Solon B. Cousins
was appointed
General Secretary
in 1966.

No YMCA could fail to be affected by the urgency of the times. All across America in the 1960s, Ys were redefining themselves as more politically relevant and socially committed and aligning themselves with the forces for social change. In 1965, the YMCA National Council voted by an overwhelming margin “to require its member associations to certify annually that their programs operated “without any discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin.”¹

Responding to the challenge, the Greater Boston YMCA turned its attention to the inner city—“the New Frontier of American democracy,” in the Kennedyesque words of one Y official.² Leading the charge was Solon B. Cousins, who became General Secretary in the summer of 1966. During his four-year tenure, the Y introduced key programs that expanded its constituency in urban areas and helped alleviate tensions.

A New Leader for New Times

The appointment of Solon Cousins, a pivotal decision in the history of the Greater Boston YMCA, came after much soul-searching on the part of the organization. Realizing that the Y needed to adapt to the rapidly changing world around it, the Board of Directors began to look for a leader who could guide the Y through these transforming times and implement fundamental reforms.³ This search produced Cousins, then Director of Personnel of the Chicago YMCA. The son of a minister, Cousins was charismatic and dynamic. “The Board hired Solon knowing what he was all about as a person,” noted Director of Camping Services Bruce Taylor. “He came in and began to shake the tree.”⁴

And shake the tree he did. Immediately on his arrival, Cousins assembled a young and talented staff and diversified the face of the Boston Y. One of the few African-American employees was William A. Wimberly, a leader in the African-American community in Boston. Cousins immediately promoted Wimberly to the position of Executive Director of the new Roxbury Y as well as Associate General Secretary, the number two position in the Greater Boston YMCA.

Wimberly would prove indispensable in the racial turmoil of the late 1960s. “Bill had an entree to the Black community when nobody else would even drive over there,” recalled longtime Y official Stan Walters. “He was the right guy at the right time and Cousins knew it.”⁵ Cousins realized that the right staff was critical. “This staff,” he said, “has tremendous ability in developing the resources of our total Greater Boston community. Our quest is to be a major influence in the life of this metropolitan area.”⁶

The Boston that greeted Cousins on his arrival was in nothing short of economic and social crisis. Urban renewal programs had revitalized the city center but wrought havoc when extended to residential neighborhoods. The flight of the white middle class to the suburbs left the city with a shrinking tax base and increasingly concentrated poor and minority communities. Local communities, both Black and white, organized to halt urban renewal projects and demand improved basic services from the city. In the South End and Roxbury, Black community organizers formed groups to oppose the Boston Redevelopment Authority and to push for more subsidized housing.⁷

Race had assumed a central role in the city’s politics. In 1967, Kevin H. White ran for mayor against Louise Day Hicks, the first serious woman candidate in Boston history. A lawyer and chair of the Boston School Committee, Hicks ran on a platform that defended neighborhood schools against charges of segregation and quickly established herself as a

1967

Kevin H. White is elected mayor of Boston.



“Our quest is to be a major influence in the life of this metropolitan area.”

—Solon B. Cousins



Mayor Kevin H. White playing squash at the Y, 1968

**Focusing on
urban outreach,
the Y turned its
attention to
the Black
and Latino
populations of
the inner city....**

champion of white, working-class ethnic voters.⁸ Although White won the election (he would go on to be mayor for an unprecedented 16 years), the issue of race would continue to plague the city for many years to come.

The Greater Boston Y was a strong advocate on the part of racial integration and tolerance, a stance that was very much in keeping with the Y's mission. Focusing on urban outreach, the Y turned its attention to the Black and Latino populations of the inner city, which had not shared proportionally in the country's economic prosperity.

To support these new ambitions, in 1967 the Y launched a capital development campaign with a goal that was several times greater than any previous amount raised. The campaign generated \$1.5 million of revenue. Although rising inflation eroded the sum's purchasing power, the Y successfully completed capital improvements for six branches.⁹

Federal funds also proved an important source for Y program development. Johnson's Great Society legislation delivered money for Head Start and college work-study programs. Among this legislation was the Scheuer Amendment to the Equal Opportunity Act, which supported programs to provide training for low-income young people to be employed in human services. Noted YMCA National Board President Wilbur M. McFeely, "The need is so great, the problems of our inner cities so critical and the costs of remedying them so high, that no independent, voluntary agency can 'go it alone' and do effective work."¹⁰

The Greater Boston Y was no exception. Drawing on his experience at the Chicago Y, which was in the vanguard of tapping federal money for Y programs, Cousins hired a grant-writer specifically for that purpose.¹¹ This strategy succeeded, winning the Y funding for many of its inner-city programs in the years that followed.



The Y's Head Start Program,
1967

Bringing Programs to the Community

Under Cousins's guidance, during the late 1960s the Greater Boston Y created programs quite different from those of the past—programs designed specifically with inner-city constituents in mind. Traditionally, the Y had focused on bringing the community inside its facilities. Now, by contrast, it brought these programs out to the community at large. Many inner-city YMCAs across the country employed a “siege mentality,” fortifying their buildings against potential rioters; the Boston branches worked with the community to develop programs that worked for them.

New Careers was the Y's first major effort in this direction. Funded by the Scheuer Amendment, New Careers provided inner-city residents with training that qualified them for YMCA executive and staff positions. (Previously, such positions required a bachelor's degree and certification by the YMCA of the USA.) “New Careers was an overt effort on the part of Cousins to bring minorities into the Y,” John E. Danielson, his successor, noted.¹²

Appropriately, the programs developed at the recently completed Roxbury Branch also exemplified this new approach. In June 1967, when racial violence shook the area, one young rioter expressed his frustration to a reporter covering the riot. “The YMCA costs too much money,” he said, “and it doesn't even have a gym.” Reading his statement in a local paper, Bill Wimberly immediately sought out a grassroots community organizer who put him in contact with the young man and his cohorts. In a move that would come to typify the YMCA response, Wimberly sat down with the group and listened to what they had to say. Said Wimberly, “They helped open our eyes to the fact that many of the basic Y programs are money-oriented and middle-class, and are simply not suitable in a ghetto area.”¹³

Wimberly and the Reverend Goldie Sherrill, a Roxbury board member, at once arranged a meeting with Cousins. Responding to the teenagers' complaints, Cousins hired Marvin “Pee Wee” Butler, an adult in the community who enjoyed good rapport with young people, as community program director. Wimberly and Butler implemented a number

1967

WHEELS program is launched.



Wimberly and Butler implemented a number of innovative programs... including a drop-in center, a night basketball league, an African cultural program, and alternative membership rates.

“This is not a traditional Y community. We think the community should have the programs it wants. It’s our job to deal with the specific needs that the YMCA can best fulfill.”
— *Bill Wimberly*

of innovative programs designed to meet their needs, including a drop-in center, a night basketball league, an African cultural program, and alternative membership rates. They also established transportation to distant housing projects, so that project youth as well as their mothers could use Y facilities. “The June incident opened our eyes,” Wimberly noted. “This is not a traditional Y community. We think the community should have the programs it wants. It’s our job to deal with the specific needs that the YMCA can best fulfill.”¹⁴

This episode taught the Y the importance of building relationships with the changing world around it. “Once the YMCA really stepped outside the four walls of the building, it began to connect with the community,” longtime Y administrator Taylor noted. “Security comes in a different way then—not because you build tall narrow windows, but because you’re connected to the community and they know and trust you.”¹⁵

WHEELS

The Roxbury Branch was also the source for WHEELS, one of the most important programs ever launched by the Greater Boston YMCA. Drawing on funding for New Careers, this innovative, crisis-intervention program was developed in 1967 to help defuse inner-city tensions.

The brainchild of Solon Cousins, WHEELS recruited and trained seven people from the community for outreach youth work and eventual permanent employment with the Y. Typically, WHEELS workers traversed the city in vans with sports equipment, organizing pick-up games on street corners. Joseph J. Cummings, police captain of District Two, praised WHEELS worker Shirley Kinnitt for organizing basketball and drill team activities as an alternative to “street programs where they may come in contact with drugs, prostitution, thievery, and the taking of handbags from the elderly.”¹⁶ The WHEELS program began with four vans and seven workers. It was not

WHEELS riders



long before the Greater Boston Y raised the number of workers to sixteen and expanded the program citywide.

The success of WHEELS depended on the individual qualities of its workers and their ability to relate to the target community. A sampling from a staff log indicates how varied and spontaneous were the workers' activities:

*Took 14 grammar school children to Wheelock College for a concert....Took a social worker to visit some of the Day Care Mothers....Picked up clothing and other household items from donors in Arlington, Winchester, New Bedford and Boston....Took 12 boys, ages 12 to 16, to a wrestling match on Saturday morning....Bused elderly on Saturday mornings to Haymarket Square for shopping....Stopped at the Harvard Street Health Center to meet a group of mothers who were seeking assistance with their children.*¹⁶

With the WHEELS program, the Y was ahead of the times in recognizing that lack of recreation and structured activities were one of the significant reasons why inner-city youth got into trouble.

WHEELS also intervened in more serious situations and maintained close contact with juvenile courts in various parts of the city, including Roxbury, Dorchester, Jamaica Plain, and Mattapan. When a youth was picked up by the police, WHEELS was often on the scene, conferring with the arresting officers and the family, arranging for bail, and helping to develop a plan for the juvenile. WHEELS workers met with the public relations officers of the Boston Police department and referred men eligible for parole to the Correctional Assistance Program, an effort to help ex-offenders make the transition from prison to community. WHEELS retained space in hospitals for referral of drug addicts and maintained working relationships with halfway houses. WHEELS workers also undertook such difficult ventures as working with the youth of housing developments.¹⁸

The Boston Housing Authority administrator, Archdale Project manager Ken Gralton, had the highest of praise for the program. "It's great. There's no recreational facilities for kids [in the

1969

Student protesters against the Vietnam War forcibly take over Harvard's University Hall, sparking a strike that shut down the university for the first time in 300 years.



WHEELS participants enjoying a game of ping pong





WHEELS basketball

projects] and there's a definite need for the program. We need all the help we can get."¹⁹ Project mothers were equally enthusiastic, as WHEELS provided the only organized, group-oriented recreational activities available to their children.

During the period of racial tension that followed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968, WHEELS more than proved its worth. In the disturbances that erupted in the Grove Hill section of Roxbury, WHEELS vans were the only vehicles, other than police cars, allowed to enter the neighborhoods. One hour after the assassination, a group of Black youths pulled a young white man from his car, beat him, and left him lying on the sidewalk, while they jumped on his car and rocked it back and forth. A YMCA WHEELS van with Bill Wimberly and WHEELS Executive Director Marvin Butler pulled up, pushed through the crowd, and carried the young man into their van. When he later revived and saw himself in a van with two Black men, he panicked and jumped out of the moving vehicle. Wimberly and Butler called the police to locate him and get him out of Roxbury before any further incidents occurred. The next day, the young man's mother called the YMCA to thank Wimberly and Butler for saving her son's life. The Y's intervention in the Grove Hill turmoil earned it a great deal of favorable press, particularly in the *Boston Herald-Traveler*, and was credited with preserving Boston from the kind of burning and destruction that cities like Detroit and Cleveland experienced in the 1960s.²⁰

The WHEELS program would continue to grow in the 1970s. By 1972, it would expand to 10 vans and serve 1,240 youth (over half male) and 234 adults. At this time, the program added a van equipped with bilingual personnel, called "Spanish in WHEELS."²¹ Early the following year, Mayor Kevin White officially commended the program:

*WHEELS has been much more than a normal run-of-the-mill program. It has affected the lives of many youngsters that it has come in contact with in a most positive and beneficial fashion.*²²

WHEELS would prove invaluable in alleviating tensions during the busing crisis of 1974.

The program proved an asset to the Greater Boston Y itself, bringing a number of strong leaders into the organization. General Board member Robert D. Brace, for one, became involved because of WHEELS. “A friend of mine told me about the WHEELS program in the 1960s,” Brace explained. “I was fascinated with the program and wanted to be part of it.”²³

Getting Students Involved

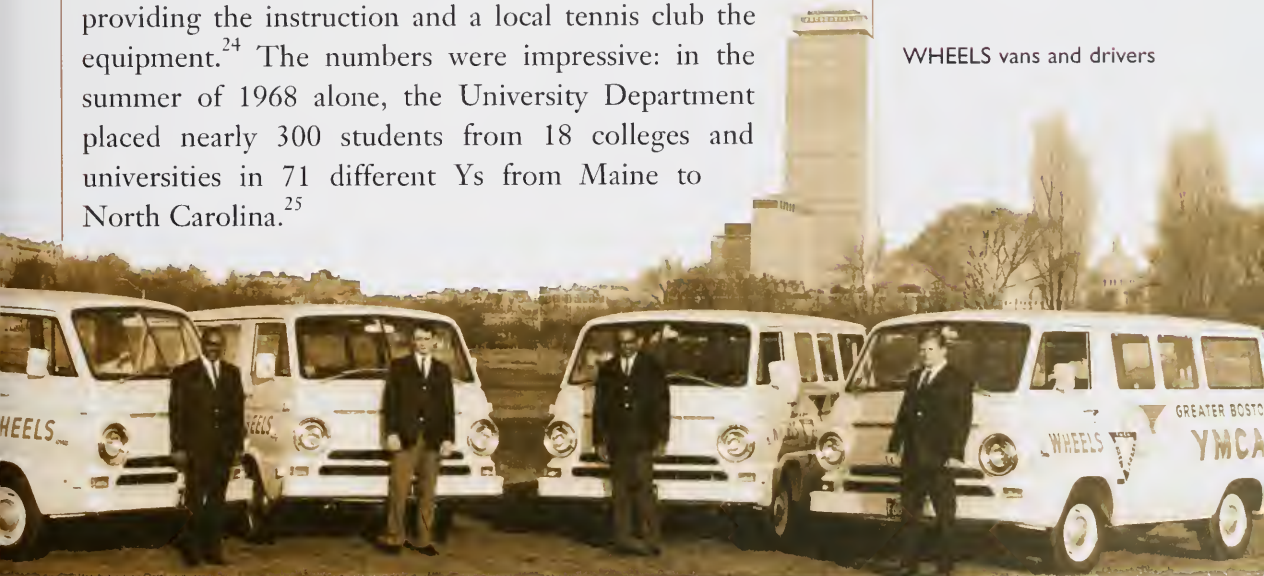
As a result of student initiative, coordinated by the Greater Boston Y's University Department, many vital student-run programs were developed during the late 1960s. Students founded a Lifer's Program that involved tutoring prisoners with life sentences in Massachusetts prisons. Woburn students, in conjunction with the Woburn Council of Social Concerns, began to work with the local Hispanic community. A Boston University student created the Massachusetts Collegiate Political Seminar Association, which provided information and a liaison for political internships. One student developed a tennis program at Carter Park in Roxbury open to the public, with the Greater Boston Y providing the instruction and a local tennis club the equipment.²⁴ The numbers were impressive: in the summer of 1968 alone, the University Department placed nearly 300 students from 18 colleges and universities in 71 different Ys from Maine to North Carolina.²⁵

1969

Y founds Dedham Branch.



WHEELS vans and drivers



...in the summer
of 1968 alone,
the University
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placed nearly
300 students
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and universities
in 71 different Ys
from Maine to
North Carolina.



John E. Danielson was
appointed General
Director and
President in 1970.

The year 1969 witnessed two important branch developments. In the spring, a new Y was organized in Dedham. That summer, the Reading Y Association became a branch of the Boston organization.²⁶ The acquisition of these suburban branches, like that of Woburn a few years earlier, brought new communities into the fold while providing financial assistance for the inner-city programs.

New Challenges

In 1970, Cousins left the YMCA of Greater Boston to head the Urban Group of YMCAs, an organization comprising the largest city Ys from across the country. His successor, John Danielson, was a career Y employee who began his work as a youth director in the Newton Y and eventually became Associate Director of the Cleveland Y before coming to Boston.

As Danielson realized on his arrival, the years that followed would be of a very different sort for the Greater Boston YMCA and other service organizations from the socially aware 1960s. Pursuing a conservative agenda, the Nixon administration drastically cut federal funding for social programs. Economic developments did not make things any easier. An oil embargo by OPEC in late 1973 created an energy crisis that triggered soaring inflation and massive unemployment in the worst economic period—an “inflationary recession,” it was called—since the Great Depression. Long lines at the gas pumps dramatically symbolized that America had entered a time of scarcity.

For Danielson, the challenge was to continue on the course set out by Cousins while meeting the financial challenges of the decade. On taking the reins, he worked with Board members and staff to develop several new ways to increase revenues, including greater allocations from the United Way, more efficient financial reports, and coordinated annual fundraising campaigns. “Fundraising became more centralized in the 1970s,” Danielson said. “Although the bulk of fundraising was still done at the branches, the overall effort was run by the Metropolitan staff.”²⁷

In addition, the Greater Boston Y helped pioneer the Management Resources Center (MRC), in Danielson's words, "a concept whereby large-city YMCAs would provide services to other independent YMCAs in a contained geographic area for a fixed fee."²⁸ The Greater Boston Y became an MRC for eastern Massachusetts. "We were one of the innovators in that program," Danielson recalled. "We worked with the National Y, and we provided services and help to all YMCAs in the Greater Boston area."²⁹

The Y also adopted a more collaborative approach toward other nonprofit agencies in the Boston area. In the early 1970s, Danielson helped found the Boston Panel of Agency Executives to enable the heads of large agencies to share information and management know-how. "We would invite government officials to come talk to us," he said. "It was a good opportunity to get to know people with similar experiences."³⁰

Juvenile Justice

While building critical financial structures and networking with other organizations in the early 1970s, the Greater Boston Y continued to launch path-breaking programs. Juvenile Justice topped the list. Developed by the Urban Action and Program Division of the National Council of YMCAs, Juvenile Justice provided a direct-service program for serious juvenile offenders, a valuable alternative to the "warehousing" practiced at so many penal institutions. Boston was chosen as one of two sites to be "demonstration areas" for the novel program attempting to grapple with this difficult social problem.³¹

The Greater Boston Y's interest in juvenile justice grew out of a state and national movement heading in the same direction. The Department of Youth Services for the state of Massachusetts immediately negotiated contracts with the Y that helped to take up the slack as federal funding slowed. DYS commissioner Jerome Miller, a leading advocate of juvenile justice reform, welcomed the Y's initiative. Alden Eberly, Vice President of the YMCA of Greater Boston, and Bruce Taylor led the Y effort, writing the proposals that brought in funding.

1974

Busing crisis rocks South Boston, East Boston, and Charlestown.



By 1978, the Y had become the state's largest provider of services for at-risk youth.

Y camps provided the facilities for the Juvenile Justice Program. Under the leadership of Robert Spencer, the first program opened at Ponkapoag, a Y facility located on public property, in the Blue Hills Reservation. "We built a building at Ponkapoag to house this program," Spencer recalled. "On a residential basis, we could handle up to 24 or 25 kids."³²

The program, however, soon ran into opposition from local neighborhoods worried about juvenile offenders escaping into the community. In 1974, the program moved to Camp Ousamequin, which was restructured as a year-round facility and later renamed Camp Halifax. A shelter-care facility was dedicated there in 1978. Housing 24 court-referred teenage boys awaiting the disposition of their cases, the facility provided space for tutorials, recreation, and counseling during the difficult time between arrest and court adjudication.

The program grew slowly but surely. By 1978, the Y had become the state's largest provider of services for at-risk youth. Eventually, 70 counselors worked with more than 700 adjudicated youths through four programs—Camp Halifax, Challenge, Intensive Treatment, and Roxbury Enrichment Services.³³ "The Boston Y was a national leader in developing alternative systems for justice for young people," Danielson noted. "We were on a social mission."³⁴

The Boston Busing Crisis

In the 1970s, racial issues continued to be an important focus of the Y's work. Because of the visionary efforts of Mayor White and leaders like the Y's Solon Cousins, Boston had managed to survive the 1960s with limited inner-city turmoil. But the peace was fragile and short-lived: Boston erupted in violence with the first school desegregation order in September 1974.³⁵

This development was long in the making. For years, Boston had studiously ignored the implications of the landmark 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, as well as the Massachusetts Racial Imbalance Act of 1965, which prohibited school committees from permitting schools to be more than 50 percent minority. In 1971, the

Massachusetts State Board of Education ordered the Boston School Committee to transport a number of white schoolchildren from schools near their homes to a newly built school in Dorchester to achieve an appropriate racial balance. The School Committee refused. In retaliation, the state withdrew \$14 million in state aid from the city, and the NAACP filed a class-action suit against the Boston School Committee. In 1974, Judge W. Arthur Garrity, Jr. ordered the city to outline a desegregation plan. When the city refused, the courts developed their own desegregation plan for Boston, which involved busing more than 18,000 schoolchildren.³⁶

The Greater Boston YMCA responded at once. Issuing an official statement, the Executive Committee of the General Board said that the Y “believes in and supports integrated education as well as quality education” and “will extend itself to aid in the orderly implementation of the law regarding Boston school desegregation.”³⁷ This was more easily said than done: because of the divide that had previously existed with the Roman Catholic Church, the Greater Boston Y had not built a significant presence in the Irish communities in East and South Boston, where the largest opposition to the busing order prevailed.

The Y, however, played a key role in lessening tensions in other parts of the city. WHEELS workers participated in a rumor control and youth work program called the Community Information and Security System that disseminated information to the Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan areas. WHEELS workers also rode the buses along with the schoolchildren, acting as monitors and mediators between whites and Blacks. “It was the law, and it was very controversial, but our workers were out trying to help out in the streets, calm kids down, and I think we were fairly effective,” Danielson said.³⁸ “Through its community branches, the Boston Y worked hard to stabilize the emotions rampant in those days,” noted Taylor. “Our quiet behind-the-scenes work was in

1971

Y launches Juvenile Justice.



**“Our quiet
behind-the-
scenes work
was in Allston-
Brighton,
Mattapan,
and Roxbury,
where we could
connect with
the kids ...”
— Bruce Taylor**

Allston-Brighton, Mattapan, and Roxbury, where we could connect with the kids who were being bused and help them understand what was happening to them.”³⁹

The Dorchester Branch devoted nearly all of its resources to the problem—and to improving race relations in general. “We were located on Washington Street, two blocks from Codman Square,” explained Neil Nichol, then Executive Director of the Dorchester Branch and currently President of the YMCA of Greater Seattle. “Dorchester was in a period of transition from white to Black. By luck of geography, we were at the epicenter of the racial tension.”⁴⁰

By coincidence, Nichol’s first day on the job was the first day of school busing. “I remember driving down Washington Street toward the Y,” he recalled. “There was a huge mass of kids standing in the middle of the street, and I wondered what they were doing there and whether they were going to school. But those kids were not going to school that day.” The Dorchester Y spent the next two weeks working to stabilize the area. “We were on the streets taking weapons from the kids, working with police, and trying to maintain a sense of calm,” Nichol said. “Although we worked primarily with young people during this difficult period, we also talked with adults about what was happening.”⁴¹

The Dorchester Branch also tried to improve race relations through programs, such as sports events, that brought together Blacks and whites from other parts of the city, and it integrated its Board of Directors for the first time. “The pervasive theme of all of our programs was the aim of getting people to see each other as individuals rather than by the color of their skin, and build a cohesive community,” Nichol noted.⁴²





Outdoor Center, 1975

Through the Dorchester Challenge, the Y made Ponkapoag in the Blue Hills Reservation available for interracial activities. There white and Black schoolchildren could share a dormitory space and explore nature together, for many their first interracial experience. Integrated groups of teenagers, designated as “school opinion leaders,” went on weekend backpacking trips together that helped to break down knee-jerk prejudices.⁴³

Black Achievers

The Greater Boston Y’s efforts on behalf of African Americans extended to the business world as well. In 1975, the Association founded Black Achievers to acknowledge the career achievements of Black professionals in the Boston area and enhance their prestige within their companies and in the community at large. Spearheaded by Danielson, Black Achievers modeled itself on the program of this name founded by the Harlem YMCA in New York City and the Chicago YMCA.

Like its Harlem and Chicago counterparts, the Boston program asked companies from the private sector to nominate Black employees who had worked for the company for two to three years and had demonstrated a history of achievement and the potential for future promotion. The criteria for becoming a Black Achiever were relatively unstructured, allowing each company to decide why a particular individual deserved acknowledgment. The companies themselves provided funding for the program. The annual banquet, where Achievers were presented and celebrated, was held during the week of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday. It soon became a premier event in the Boston social calendar.⁴⁴

1973

During the energy crisis, the Hancock tower, which for many years forecast the weather with its bright red and blue beacon, goes dark to set an example of conservation for the entire city to see.



...in 1987, under the leadership of President Peter B. Post, the Greater Boston Y made Black Achievers an official branch—granting it the status and national recognition it deserved. Black Achievers has proved a model for Ys nationwide ever since.

The Greater Boston Y's Black Achievers, however, differed from the Harlem program in one important respect—a “linkage” component that asked award recipients to donate 40 hours of community service time, primarily with young people with college potential. Many believe the linkage component gave the program longevity. Perhaps the richest linkage program was Project Discovery, a three-day program in career exploration for high school students.⁴⁵ In the 1980s, Black Achievers also began to sponsor a highly popular, annual College Fair for historically black colleges.

In the years to come, the Boston Black Achievers program would prove so successful that in 1987, under the leadership of President Peter B. Post, the Greater Boston Y made it an official branch—granting it the status and national recognition it deserved. Black Achievers has proved a model for Ys nationwide ever since.

Other Programs

Under Danielson, the branches of the Greater Boston Y developed many of their own programs as well. In 1970, the Roxbury Branch was selected as a testing center for a “mini-bike” program developed by the Los Angeles YMCA in cooperation with Honda, Inc., a program designed to reach urban youth not responding to other outreach efforts. This popular undertaking offered young people courses in mechanics as well as competitive riding.⁴⁶ The Roxbury Branch also introduced Project Serve, a program directed at court-referred teenage girls.

The Dorchester Branch, too, created its share of new programs. Project Headway provided crisis intervention and alternative schooling for first-offender teenage boys, while Project Aware aimed to curtail alcohol abuse in teenagers.⁴⁷ In cooperation with Project Y.E.S. (Youth Enrichment Services), the Dorchester Branch used E.E.P.A. (a government resource) funds to create jobs for teens in its own building. In the Blue Hills, 35 other teens from across the state earned money while doing forestry work in the Ponkapoag Outdoor Center's Youth Conservation Corps project.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, the Huntington Branch (later renamed the Central Branch) launched the Correctional Assistance Program. This initiative helped the transition of former inmates into society by assisting them with education and job counseling, housing on credit at the Y, and small loans.

To foster program growth without incurring large construction expenses, during the 1970s the Y experimented with bubble structures at two branch sites. The South Cove bubble housed the entire facility of the Chinese Branch, while the Reading bubble housed the branch's three tennis courts. "Bubbles are air-supported structures that are not expensive to build," Danielson noted. "They were an innovative way for a community to have a life."⁴⁹

Reaching Out with Camps

During the late 1960s, Greater Boston YMCA camps continued to flourish, with enrollments reaching new highs.⁵⁰ At the time, the Y ran three resident boys' camps, Ousamequin and Dorchester in Massachusetts and North Woods in New Hampshire. A rudimentary day-camp program was in operation at the Hale Reservation in Westwood, involving mostly members of the West Roxbury, Dorchester, Central, Hyde Park, and Roxbury branches.

The numbers of girl members were growing, but ever since 1959, when Camp Dee closed operations, the Y had had no resident camps for girls. In 1967, the Y decided to address this problem.⁵¹ Persuaded by then Director of Camping Edwin C. Johnson, the Board of Directors purchased 28 acres on Lake Wentworth in New Hampshire. Pleasant Valley Camp signaled a new commitment on the part of the YMCA to women and girls. When the facilities turned out to be too small for its needs, the Y eventually sold the property and moved Pleasant Valley to a site adjacent to the boys' camp at North Woods.

In 1972, Bruce Taylor became Director of Camping, bringing with him a missionary zeal to serve the Y's agenda of

1975

The Y founds
Black Achievers.



Archery at Camp
Dorchester, 1967

Coming at time of rising divorce rates and two-career families, the day-camp became a kind of de facto child care—and marked the beginning of the Y's work in this crucial area.

serving inner-city and minority children and youth. Believing that camps should build character, Johnson had focused on “developing young men’s potential and growing them to be individuals.” Taylor, by contrast, favored day-camps as a way of maximizing the number of kids that the Y could reach. They would thus better serve the local communities that were the Y’s true constituencies.⁵² Under his lead, the Y turned Camp Dorchester into a day-camp and renamed it the Ponkapoag Outdoor Center. Coming at a time of rising divorce rates and two-career families, the day-camp became a kind of de facto child care—and marked the beginning of the Y’s work in this crucial area.

Suburban Expansion

In 1980, the Needham YMCA became a branch of the Greater Boston Y, thus continuing the policy of suburban expansion begun with the Woburn Y in the mid-1960s. As that experience had shown, suburban branches could prove an important source of revenues to support the Y’s urban programs.

On the face of it, the prospects for success were good. Needham had excellent facilities, an innovative child care program, and a thriving Indian Guides program, the father-son relationship program popular in Ys across the country but undeveloped in Boston. Although the branch’s finances were weak, there was every reason to believe they could be turned around: after all, Woburn’s finances were unstable at the time of its merger, and it soon became a great asset. Moreover, Needham came with a \$1 million endowment that the Y would receive on completion of the merger.

Soon after the merger, however, it became apparent that the extent of Needham’s debt was greater than had been anticipated, certainly more than the YMCA could absorb. Within two years, the Y sold off Needham’s facilities, the Greendale Avenue property, which included a large outdoor swimming pool and an ice skating rink. Needham was not a total loss, however. It brought to the Y a very strong Board of Directors, many of whom played a vital role in the capital campaign later in the decade.⁵³



The late 1960s marked a turning point in the history of the YMCA of Greater Boston. Under Solon Cousins, the Greater Boston YMCA responded to the urban crisis, powerfully redefining its traditional mission—a reinterpretation that would define the organization for decades to come. Implementing significant social programs aimed at the inner city, the Y took its programs in a bold new direction, moving from a traditional set of services for a mostly middle-class white male membership to services for people across the entire socioeconomic spectrum. John Danielson followed this path as far as financial constraints would allow.

Although lack of funding eventually put an end to many of the programs of these turbulent times, the Greater Boston YMCA had turned a crucial corner. There could be no going back to the safe times when most of the Y's constituency was white and middle-class. The organization had shown remarkable courage and leadership in a period of social disruption. It now faced the task of putting its house in order for its new residents.



Martial arts class, 1978



Children
at the
Roxbury Y,
1976

1978

The Blizzard of '78—the “storm of the century”—blankets the region in over two feet of snow, claiming 54 lives, dismantling 2,000 homes, driving 10,000 people into shelters, and causing \$1 billion in damage in just two days.



1981–1990

1981

Peter B. Post
becomes
President



1984

Training, Inc.
is founded



CHAPTER FIVE

A Time to Rebuild, 1981–1990

1986

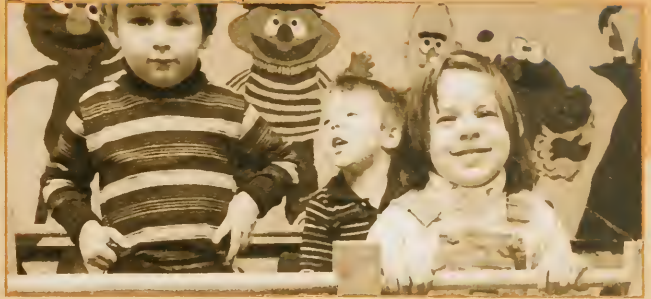
International
Services
achieve branch
status

1987

Families in
Transition is
created to
provide housing
for homeless
families

1988

The YMCA of
Greater Boston
becomes the
metropolitan area's
largest child care
provider



The 1980s opened with the most severe recession in U.S. history since the Great Depression, as inflation remained in the double digits and unemployment surpassed 10 percent.¹ In this difficult period, President Ronald Reagan pursued an agenda that focused on revitalizing the economy. Applying conservative fiscal policies, he pushed through Congress the largest tax and spending cuts in U.S. history. Over the first four years of his presidency, Reagan cut programs in public health, welfare, unemployment benefits, and education by \$130.6 billion—cuts that put an enormous strain on state and municipal budgets. At the same time, personal income taxes were reduced by 25 percent and defense spending was dramatically increased. Homelessness became a troubling feature of the 1980s social landscape.

Defense spending coupled with growth in high technology enabled Massachusetts to weather the recession better than most of the rest of the country. The gains, however, were unevenly distributed. The state lost manufacturing jobs and blue-collar workers felt the pressure of a national downturn in the economy more than white-collar workers did. In the 1980 election, a Massachusetts referendum question known as Proposition 2½ placed a cap on increases in state

**During the 1980s,
the Y pursued a
new strategy for
fiscal stability.**

property taxes that limited the growth of city or town revenues, adding to the fiscal strain on municipalities. Boston mayor White was forced to lay off 4,000 city employees, including police and firemen, further alienating him from working-class residents in the city's traditional white neighborhoods.²

For the YMCA of Greater Boston, the challenges of the new decade were not unprecedented: it had survived hard times often in the past. What was altogether new, however, was the way it met these challenges. During the 1980s, the Y pursued a fresh strategy for fiscal stability, focusing attention on improving its infrastructure—hiring staff, and finding ways to increase revenues and control costs. This strategy would enable the Y to respond to changes in demographics, the workplace, health care, and the family. To meet these challenges, the Y built a stronger, more resilient institution that addressed the requirements of an increasingly diverse constituency.

Leading the way in these endeavors was Peter B. Post, an experienced Y executive who was president of the Association from 1981 to 1992. (Like Danielson before him, he would later go on to join the YMCA of the USA as Associate National Executive Director.) Post had already had a long career with the Y of Greater Boston. In 1964, he was appointed Executive Director of the then independent Woburn Y. Four years later, after the Woburn Y merged with Boston, he became the first Vice President of Public Relations and Fund raising, an experience that would prove instructive as the Y entered a new era of media—and cost—consciousness.



Peter B. Post,
Y President,
1981–1992

1982

Planning of the Central Artery/Tunnel project—generally known as the “Big Dig”—begins.



Taking Stock

Although Massachusetts benefited from the federal government's increases in defense spending in the early 1980s, the gains were concentrated in developed sectors of the economy, such as high technology, biotechnology, and health care. These gains did little to improve the economic conditions of the poor, the working class, and minorities. Like many organizations, the YMCA of Greater Boston was hard hit. The existing deficit was worsened by soaring interest rates, which would reach 22 percent by 1982. “We had a \$1 million credit line with Shawmut Bank,” Post recalled. “We were paying prime plus one, which means 23 percent. That meant \$220,000 that the Y owed to Shawmut Bank before it did a thing.”³

Post knew that it would take strong measures to improve the fiscal situation. It was, he believed, necessary to cut programs. The program that was sacrificed for financial stability was Juvenile Justice, which had always been very difficult to administer. The Y sold the Camp Halifax property and later the Brockton Y successfully bid to take over the Challenge Program.⁴

Making the Most of the Massachusetts Miracle

Gradually, the recession began to abate. Over the next six years, the national economy improved markedly, with the Dow rising from 700 to 2,500. Locally, the 1980s were the decade of the “Massachusetts Miracle,” when the state's economy, with Governor Michael S. Dukakis at the helm, experienced a tremendous boom. Having survived the worst, the Greater Boston Y was now in a position to stabilize its financial position and reap the benefits of the improved economy.

Under Post's leadership, the Y launched the Strategic Plan for 1984–1989. This plan, the first developed by the organization, contained a much more aggressive marketing strategy, which featured short-term improvements to facilities to boost membership sales and concluded with a large capital drive.

Governor Michael S. Dukakis speaking at the Greater Boston Y



At this time, the Y also reassessed its mission, in accordance with the changing needs of its constituencies. In 1984, Raymond L. Flynn succeeded Kevin White as mayor of Boston, the first political leader from South Boston to run the city. Although Flynn opposed the desegregation of schools, he equally opposed violence in any form and came out strongly in support of Blacks who were threatened or harmed in the school busing crisis. Racial tensions eased considerably, and the number of reported hate crimes decreased as well.⁵

As it had so many times in the past, the Y updated its mission of Christian values in the service of “spiritual, physical, mental and social development” of its members. The strategic plan focused on programming in five specific areas: physical fitness and mental well-being; the development of values; services to meet changing urban needs; the needs of minorities; and responsibility in the international community.⁶ After 15 years of focusing on urban community outreach, the Y saw a renewed demand for its traditional services in the areas of mental and physical health. It shifted the emphasis of its urban programs from the outreach, crisis-intervention efforts to job training and family support. In addition, the Y further committed itself to including more minorities on its Board of Directors and professional staff.

Within the spirit of these five mission commitments, the Y declared three further program goals—child care, work with youth, and personal health and fitness—that indicated its keen awareness of the profound changes in American society.

Focusing on Families

The 1980s witnessed the culmination of a development that had begun a decade earlier, the disintegration of middle-class families. Rising steeply, divorce rates peaked in 1979, when the annual rate was nearly triple that of 40 years earlier. The numbers of families headed by a single parent also rose precipitously.⁷ This trend continued in the 1980s. Between 1980 and 1990, the percentage of children in Boston living in families headed by a married couple declined from 54 to 49 percent.⁸

Rising divorce rates also had a significant impact on the earning power of those involved. Despite the burdens of alimony or child support, men's income usually went up substantially after divorce, while women's, on average, went down even more—the so-called “feminization of poverty.”⁹

Stepping into this breach, the Greater Boston YMCA created programs to take the pressure off single and working mothers and provide children with quality day care. This work had begun in the mid-1970s, when the Y began running day care facilities with a Title XX grant from the Massachusetts Department of Public Welfare. At this time, the Y offered

1984

The Greater Boston Y embarks on the Strategic Plan for 1984–1989.



Day care scenes from the Reading Branch



The YMCA provides a full spectrum of care for infants, toddlers, and pre-school age children.

day care services to 90 school-age children in the Greater Boston area, focusing mainly on Hyde Park, Roxbury, the South End, and Dorchester.

Over the years, the Y's involvement in day care grew quietly—but rapidly. In 1978, the Y obtained a license to run infant, toddler, and pre-school programs. The Waltham Y offered a nursery program, Dorchester had an infant/toddler and pre-school program, and Roxbury ran a pre-school program.¹⁰

The Y's provision of day care grew steadily in the 1980s. With the addition of Needham in 1980, the Y inherited a nursery school program, which it kept in operation. In 1981, the Y launched a school-age program in Woburn. Five years later, the program moved to a leased space in a church basement because the effort was expanding beyond the capacity of the Y's original facilities. In an attempt to explore the potential for a Southwest Branch, the Y opened up a pre-school program in Walpole. By 1988, the YMCA of Greater Boston was the metropolitan area's largest child care provider, with 16 locations around the city and nearly 1,000 children participating every day in a variety of nursery school, after-school, vacation-time, and full-day care programs.¹¹

Though not specifically designated as urban programs, child care programs also benefited inner-city families, statistically more likely to be headed by a woman and of lower income. The Roxbury Y's Adolescent Parents' and Children's Center represented a particularly innovative program. Bilingual and multicultural, the Adolescent Parents' and Children's Center offered day care facilities in English High School in Jamaica Plain during school hours so that teenage parents could attend classes. Participants also received transportation, health and social services, counseling, and training in parenting skills, designed to provide support, so that parenting would not jeopardize the education of young people.¹²

1986

Boston Harbor
cleanup
begins.



One particularly noteworthy family program that the Y instituted during the 1980s provided care for more than just children. After federal welfare cuts, there was widespread anecdotal evidence, backed up by shelter workers, that homelessness in America was on the rise and constituted a significant social problem, although specific figures were hard to come by. The suspiciously low estimates produced by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1984 were the subject of two congressional hearings. Books like Jonathan Kozol's searing portrait of homeless families, *Rachel and Her Children*, called attention to the fact that many homeless people were in fact families.

In response, in 1987 the Y of Greater Boston created the Families in Transition Program at the Central Branch to alleviate the grossly inadequate supply of shelter for homeless families and to help them secure permanent housing.¹³ The program provided both transitional housing and counseling in life skills to assist these families in the process of readjustment. The Greater Boston Y was one of only 15 Ys nationwide to offer transitional housing for homeless families. In the first three and one-half years of its existence, Families in Transition helped over 200 families.¹⁴

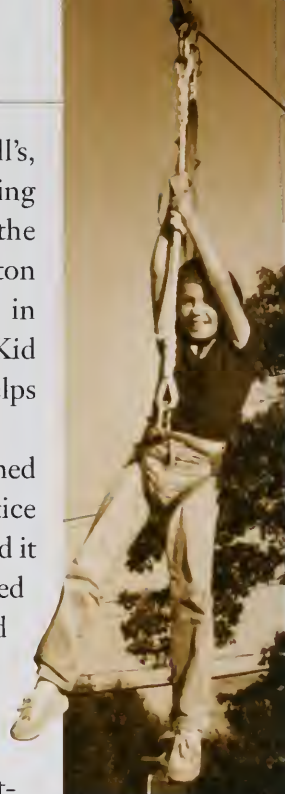
High Flight

The crisis of the middle-class family meant that many of the problems formerly thought to be specific to inner-city children—problems like drugs and delinquency—now increasingly confronted suburban families as well. With the disintegration of the traditional family unit, suburban youth often lacked attention and supervision to structure their time, the very problems that often led to delinquency in urban settings.

“High Flight” originated in 1984 as a program funded by the Department of Youth Services (DYS) and Marshall’s, the off-price department store. Massachusetts district attorney Scott Harshberger, known for his support of child-abuse victims, attended North Suburban Board meetings in Woburn to lobby for the program. Frank Brenton, Y Board member and

retired chairman of the board of Marshall's, helped persuade the company's marketing department to coproduce a video about the program for promotional purposes. Brenton also assisted in placing an "aditorial" in Boston newspapers, "How High Can a Kid Fly?," explaining how the program helps first-time offenders.

High Flight took the experience gleaned from the WHEELS and Juvenile Justice programs in the 1960s and 1970s and applied it to a new program constituency—disaffected white suburban youth. An adventure-based program for troubled middle teens (ages 12–15), High Flight was modeled on the physical and interpersonal challenges of Outward Bound. Courts, police departments, schools, and other agencies referred at-risk youths to the program. At the outset, High Flight was conceived as an intervention program aimed at teens aged 15 to 17. That focus changed, however, because DYS funds soon evaporated and other agencies providing resources were more interested in prevention than intervention. Consequently, the Y redesigned High Flight as a prevention program for middle-school teens. Several outside evaluations, including one by the Association for Experiential Education, have testified to the program's success.¹⁵



Ropes course activity

Whitewater rafting through the High Flight Program



Fueling the Fitness Trend

In the mid-1970s, America rediscovered the physical and mental benefits of exercise. Driven by the Baby Boomers, the “Me Generation” traded social improvement for self-improvement, and fitness was in vogue like never before. Y memberships grew rapidly.

The sudden popularity was welcome, but not without side effects. Overcrowding of athletic facilities and increased competition from for-profit fitness clubs were common complaints in this period. Suburban facilities like North Suburban—whose memberships provided critical revenues—were especially hard hit.¹⁶

Like most YMCAs across the country, the Greater Boston YMCA found itself caught in a conundrum. To expand its membership, the Association had to ensure that its equipment and facilities were roughly comparable to those of private health clubs. By offering comparable services, however, it opened itself up to criticism that it was competing with for-profit health clubs,

and risked revocation of its property-tax exemption status. Indeed, revoking the Y’s nonprofit status was the goal of a flurry of legal activity in the mid-1980s and continued through the 1990s. The Y deflated these efforts by focusing attention on its work in behalf of the less advantaged. It eliminated the higher-priced membership options that had targeted the corporate market and reminded the public of its generous scholarship program.

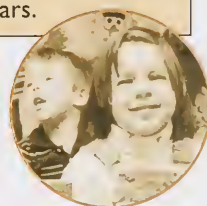


Weightlifting at the Y



1987

The Greater Boston Y begins its first major capital campaign in 20 years.



International Services

While maintaining its mission of keeping families strong, the Y remained keenly aware of Boston's changing demographics. In the 1970s, immigrants from a wide range of countries and cultures had begun to diversify the predominantly Yankee and Irish population. Immigrants from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Russia fled the Soviet regime. West Indian immigrants from Barbados and Jamaica brought new traditions to the African-American community. Asian refugees from war-torn Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos joined with immigrants from Taiwan, mainland China, and Japan to produce a tapestry of Asian cultures. Perhaps the largest influx of new immigrants came from the Spanish-speaking cultures of the Caribbean, and Central and South America—Cuba,



People of many different countries—and ages—enjoy the Y's rich array of programs.

Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, and Columbia. By 1980, as many as 87,000 Boston residents had been born in foreign countries and 100,000 spoke a language other than English at home.¹⁷

The Greater Boston Y took steps to meet the needs of its increasingly diversified constituency. In 1975, it closed the Huntington School after 63 years of service. A preparatory school largely for urban boys, it had fallen below capacity and was having trouble making ends meet. That same year, the Y launched Hispanic Services, a licensed adult education and amnesty center. Hispanic Services offered courses in English as a Second Language (ESL) and in job-related skills for new immigrants. When the owner of Fishery Products, Inc., for example, wanted to set up on-the-job English language classes for his Cape Verdean, Hispanic, and Brazilian employees, he contacted the Y.¹⁸ In 1982, Hispanic Services was renamed the ESL Program. Four years later, the international programs achieved branch status.¹⁹ By 1990, International Services, as it was now called, served over 1,200 immigrants, refugees, and other adults.²⁰

International Services provided an impressive array of programs and courses for new immigrants, sustaining a tradition the Y had established in its early years. The difference now was that adults as well as young people were the beneficiaries. Indeed, the YMCA of Greater Boston is the only Y in the country to maintain a continual program in adult education.²¹

In addition, International Services ran Campamento Hispano, a day-camp program for Spanish-speaking youth, with a Pan-Latin American focus. Immigrants from more than 20 different countries, each with its own distinct culture, composed Boston's Latino community. Campamento Hispano, focused on deepening cultural understanding among Latino kids.²²

The Y reached out to Spanish cultures beyond Boston as well. In the 1980s, the organization developed a strong partnership with the YMCA in Sao Paulo, Brazil, helping to build a Y facility in the Amazon. It also sponsored an exchange program to enable young people from Sao Paulo to improve their English in an American setting.

1986

The Boston Celtics win the NBA Finals for the third year in a row.



When the owner of Fishery Products, Inc., . . . wanted to set up on-the-job English language classes for his Cape Verdean, Hispanic, and Brazilian employees, he contacted the Y.



A Training, Inc. classroom

Training, Inc.

The spending cuts introduced by the Reagan administration hit especially hard welfare programs that focused on job training, including the Comprehensive Employment Training Act initiatives, the Job Corps, Public Service Employment, and Head Start. Such endeavors were reduced and in some cases eliminated.²³ The elimination of these programs affected not only the poor and underemployed but also businesses in need of trained employees as the economy began its recovery.

Here again the Y stepped into the breach. In 1984, it launched Training, Inc., an adult education program of major importance. Started in Chicago nearly a decade earlier, the program came to Boston largely because Training, Inc. prepared unemployed and underemployed adults for office positions.

The program simulated a work-place environment with participants applying for and holding specific jobs within a mock company. Training, Inc. personnel supervised and

evaluated their performance. Courses in business and computer skills were also offered. Eventually, Training, Inc. was running six concurrent courses of study three times a year.²⁴

Training, Inc. proved so successful that it achieved branch status in 1986. Though open to all adults, the program was aimed particularly at women. "Education is the only way to prevent someone from being poor," program founder and director Elsa Bengal noted. "And educating women makes the most difference in the quality of life for whole families."²⁵

By the year 2001, Training, Inc. had graduated approximately 2,500, with some 200 employers reporting satisfaction with the program. Ninety percent of Training, Inc. graduates remained employed three years later, and an equally high percentage received raises and/or promotions after a year on the job.²⁶ Of all the programs started during his tenure as president, Post regarded Training, Inc. as his top achievement. "Training, Inc. has fundamentally changed the Boston business community's perception of welfare mothers," he said.²⁷ The YMCA, too, benefited from the program, which helped attract and retain a large number of corporate leaders.

Capital Campaign

A stronger Board in turn gave the Y confidence to launch a major capital campaign in 1987, the first such campaign in 20 years. In some respects, the campaign was overdue. Three of the Y's buildings dated from the early years of the twentieth century and four from the early 1950s. The last major refurbishment was undertaken in the 1960s.²⁸ The upgrading and modernization of the Y's facilities was a crucial component of Post's goal of tightening up the infrastructure of the Y.

The chairs of the boards of Raytheon and John Hancock headed the capital campaign committee. "This was the first



Rigorous training and hands-on work led to successful graduation.

1988

The Greater Boston Y is the area's largest provider of child care services.



The Dorchester Y ran a successful capital campaign for a swimming pool.



time in the Y's history we were able to attract this level of business support," Post noted.²⁹ The goal was an ambitious \$10 million. Along with cash gifts, the Y received two significant gifts of land. The Elliott estate was bequeathed to the Y and, when sold in 1986, produced nearly \$1 million, which was later used for the capital expansion of the Charles River YMCA. Soon afterwards, Daniel Striar and his wife gave the Y an 11-acre parcel of land to be used to augment this branch.

The Tufts HMO Collaboration

During the 1980s, health care costs in the United States began rising rapidly, under an insurance regime that gave doctors wide latitude in deciding treatment options for patients. American doctors seemed to order more tests and procedures than did their European counterparts, yet the life expectancy of Americans was no greater. Across the country,

managed care emerged as an alternative designed by employers and insurance companies to bring costs under control.³⁰

The Greater Boston YMCA demonstrated its entrepreneurial savvy by arranging with Tufts New England Medical Center HMO to provide fitness benefits for their subscribers. At the time, Tufts was a young company looking to create a market niche in eastern Massachusetts by offering something unique. In 1986, Tufts and the Greater Boston Y reached a deal: Tufts would offer its participants savings when purchasing a YMCA membership; it would also pay the Y a capitation fee of \$.50 per adult and \$1.00 per family per month for all of its members who designated a YMCA. The Y, in turn, agreed to bring 30 other independent Ys in eastern Massachusetts into the collaborative. The deal was a success. In just one year, nearly 1,000 participants in the Tufts plan joined branches of the Greater Boston Y.³¹

The Tufts HMO partnership was another smart program initiated in the 1980s that raised the visibility of the Y, provided revenue, and increased membership, at little extra cost. "This program was really a pioneer," remarked program developer Bob Spencer. "Ys all across the country tried to duplicate this and very few, if any, have."³²

1989

Hit hard by the collapse of the micro-computer industry, Boston enters a period of severe recession.



The start of a 10K race cosponsored by Tufts HMO and the YMCA



Arlene Appleton, who at the age of 74 completed the Tufts 10K race



In 1995, the Y switched providers to Harvard Pilgrim Health Care (HPHC), but the basics of the collaborative program remained essentially unchanged. The collaborations with Tufts and Harvard Pilgrim proved crucial in expanding membership. At the time of the move to Harvard Pilgrim, 25 percent of all Y members came from the Tufts relationship.



After more than a decade of new socially oriented programs, the 1980s were a time for the YMCA of Greater Boston to return to the basics that had made it successful. Under Post's leadership, the organization strengthened its infrastructure in ways that would enable it to support its existing programs and develop new ones. New talent, the

elimination of wasteful programs, and a major capital campaign—these all helped the Y begin to rebuild from the inside. The tried and true programs—fitness and child care—along with the major innovations of the decade—Families in Transition, International Services, Training, Inc., and the Tufts partnership—all enabled the Y to return to financial stability while responding to the changing needs of its many constituencies. The strategy worked—and paved the way for the phenomenal success that lay ahead in the 1990s.

1989

The Y's capital campaign for Waltham, Dorchester, and North Woods is completed.



Children and teens at the Roxbury Branch

1991–2001

1991

The Strategic Plan of the Greater Boston YMCA is launched

1993

John M. Ferrell becomes President



1995

The Boston Police Partnership Program is established



1996

The Y launches Focus2000

CHAPTER SIX

A Decade of Innovation, 1991–2001

1997

The Campaign
for Keeping
Families Strong
begins

**1999**

Burbank
Branch opens
in Reading

2000

Wang Branch
opens in
Chinatown

2001

Oak Square
Branch opens,
replacing the
Allston-Brighton
Branch



The last decade of the millennium began rather tenuously for the Greater Boston YMCA. The United States was still in the throes of the recession precipitated by the Market Crash of 1987. Embracing the concept of reengineering, companies across the country downsized their workforces.

As the decade advanced, however, significant changes quickly began reshaping the American economy and work force. The convergence of various factors—the growth of the high tech industry and the emergence of a global economy—ushered in the Information Age, the foremost period of economic growth of the century. The expanded economy created new wealth and a new, more mobile, and better-educated work force. More and more family units with two working parents had to find ways to adjust to a different set of demands being placed on them. The tight labor market led to more flexible work scheduling in some fields, but in many others, greater community outreach was needed to help families. The economic expansion succeeded in reshaping the lives of many, including the disadvantaged who held jobs for the first time, but along with these positive changes came a greater need for child care.

During both the recession and the boom that followed, the Greater Boston YMCA remained attentive to the changing

...in 1990 the YMCA developed a new program to ensure that the Y would remain affordable and accessible to all, without regard to ability to pay.

needs of its constituency, enlarging its range of facilities, programs, locations, and community involvement. At the same time, the organization substantially improved its financial health while upholding the agenda of social responsibility set by Solon Cousins in the late 1960s. In adapting to contemporary circumstances, the Y continued to follow the principles that had guided it in the past—its commitment to “spirit, mind, and body” through programs that “promote good health, strong families, youth leadership, community development, and international understanding.”¹

Gearing Up: The Strategic Plan

The decade opened on a less than optimistic note, as the recession launched by the crash of 1987 showed no signs of abating. The Northeast was hard hit and Massachusetts particularly so. Under Peter Post’s continued leadership, in 1990 the YMCA developed a new program to ensure that the Y would remain affordable and accessible to all, without regard to ability to pay. The Association announced ACCESS, a program that provided sliding scale fees for low-income children, families, and individuals. By 2000, ACCESS would enable the Y to award more than \$1.5 million in fee reductions annually.

In the same year, with support from the General Board and its Chairman, Thomas J. Mahoney, the Y implemented “A Strategic Plan of the Greater Boston YMCA, 1991–1995.” This plan identified important demographic and social trends that would influence the Y’s development: growth in middle-aged and older adults; an increase in the number and proportion of persons of color; a widening gap between rich and poor; a rise in the number of working women; changes in the structure of the family; and the need for educational reform.² Responding to these trends, the Y focused on expanding programs for teenagers, older citizens, and families, promoting diversity among its staff and board members, enlarging and improving facilities, and encouraging community development.

In the fall of 1992, Post left to become Associate Director of the YMCA of the USA. A national search, chaired by William F. Meagher, later elected Chairman of the Greater

Boston YMCA's General Board, yielded a new President. John M. Ferrell, recruited by Post to Boston in 1991 as Senior Vice President, was a Yale Divinity School graduate and a career YMCA professional with both local and national Y experience.

On taking the reins in 1993, Ferrell pledged to continue the agenda set by his predecessors and to bolster the management and financial health of the Association. To ensure success, he focused on strengthening the General Board of Directors. "We worked hard to identify new board members who could provide leadership, generate new resources for us, and contribute to the Y personally," Ferrell said. "Our board became stronger, and it was more connected with corporate Boston and had much greater ability to bring resources to the Y than we had in the recent past. But, of course, board development is a never ending process."³

The revitalized board immediately took steps to reposition the Y in the Boston business community. Although the Association had been a leading provider of services for low-income families and children in Boston since the late 1960s, its image as predominantly a "swim and gym" organization persisted. "The issue was perception," Ferrell noted. "We were viewed as a sleeping giant for quite a long time." General Board member Dell Mitchell championed the repositioning effort. Under her leadership, the Y developed a new logo and theme, "Keeping Families Strong," created a media campaign based on this theme, and worked on making the Y's mission and programs more visible to Boston's corporate and community leadership. (Mitchell later became the first woman Chair of the General Board; her successors, Joan L. Gulley and Jerry M. Socol, would continue this objective as well.)

At the same time, the Association pursued the all-important goal of financial strength. This meant focusing attention on growing resources, opening new extension sites, and increasing contributed income. The approach soon yielded tangible benefits. By 1995, the Y eliminated the accumulated operating



Y President John M. Ferrell

1990

Boston's population stands at 374,283, a decline of 28 percent since its 1950 peak.



deficit and, for the first time in three decades, reported a positive bottom line in its operating balance sheet. As a symbol of the renewed spirit, in 1994 the Association restored its historic lighted sign on the roof of the Huntington Avenue building, for many years in disrepair. Once again, “YMCA” would be a city landmark, a beacon in the night.

Building for a New Decade

While it was solidifying its financial base in the early 1990s, the YMCA turned its attention to neglected facilities.

While it was solidifying its financial base in the early 1990s, the YMCA turned its attention to neglected facilities. Between 1990 and 1995, the Association built, renovated, or expanded cardiovascular fitness centers at many of its branches. With approximately \$2 million from the recent capital campaign, the Y relocated the Pleasant Valley Camp for Girls from Wentworth Lake to Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire, and expanded its capacity from 75 to 130 campers.

But no doubt the most important renovation of all—indeed, critical to financial health and future growth—was the renovation of the Huntington Avenue building. After many decades of active use, the 1913 building was in disrepair and inadequate for contemporary needs. Northeastern University, which had leased dorm and classroom space for some 20 years, announced that it would no longer need space in the Y building. This led the General Board to consider selling the Huntington Avenue building and building a new facility elsewhere in the city.

After protracted negotiations with Northeastern failed to result in a sale, the General Board approved a creative plan to revamp the historic structure. Renovation, however, proved a daunting task because of the size of the building, the scope of the renovations, and the projected cost of the project. A private developer, Trinity Financial, Inc., helped the Y devise and implement an \$8.2 million renovation plan funded by federal low-income housing tax credits and city, state, and private grants. The result: 22 rehabilitated units for formerly homeless families and 66 single units for formerly homeless individuals, plus refurbished common areas and improvements to the building infrastructure.

1993

The Greater Boston YMCA changes its name to the YMCA of Greater Boston.

The renovation of the Huntington Avenue site provided a much-needed facelift and extended the life of the facility appreciably. On completion of the repairs, the building was added to the National Registry of Historic Buildings. The renewed commitment to Boston's "Cultural District" secured the YMCA's presence on the city's newly named "Avenue of the Arts." "It was a turning point in the Y's history," noted Ferrell. "It was an essential first step in building the Y's financial health so we could turn our attention to the future and develop our programs. The albatross was off our backs."⁴

Other branches saw major improvements as well. Long one of the Y's most overcrowded branches, the Dorchester Y's facility was a prime candidate. Its board raised \$400,000 of the \$1.6 million necessary for the renovation, the balance coming from the capital campaign conducted in the late 1980s. In 1995, on the occasion of its 76th anniversary, the Dorchester Branch held a dedication ceremony for the newly renovated



Renovated
Central Branch on
Huntington Avenue

complex. Bricks installed in the building's front windows to ward off vandalism in the 1970s were removed, symbolizing a new phase in the history of the Y. "Opening up the windows," explained local businessman and planning committee member James G. Keefe, "was an important message to the community, particularly the kids, that this place was open for business."⁵

During the mid-1990s, the YMCA also refurbished its Ponkapoag Outdoor Center, a Y day camp facility originally built as a resident camp in the 1920s by the Dorchester Branch. Located in the Blue Hills Reservation, a state conservation preserve in Canton, the camp offered nature trails and a rich natural environment, including endangered species. Ponkapoag became the new site for the Y's Campamento Hispano Internacional, a bilingual camp program for Latino youth previously located in Jamaica Plain. Through renovations costing \$300,000, large, open pavilions replaced older cabins, and a new main lodge served as a centerpiece for the campsite.

Child Care

The convergence of two major developments in American society in the 1990s made the need for child care services and other family programs more pressing than ever before. Parents were working harder and longer hours while the number of children—the offspring of the Baby Boom generation—was rising. As a consequence, two-income couples and working single parents found themselves stretched to the limit caring for children and elderly parents. For some time, the Y had made services for families the center of program development. Starting in 1982, off-site child care programs provided a way for many branches to expand their outreach. By 1988, the YMCA had become the single largest provider of child care in the Boston area.

During the 1990s, the demand for the Y's child care services grew dramatically. The YMCA added more care centers and ensured that these facilities were accessible to people of all income levels through state

Children's activities at the Waltham Branch





1993

Thomas M. Menino is elected Mayor of Boston.



Children playing at the Charles River Branch in Needham

contracts and vouchers. In 2000, an estimated 70 percent of all children in child care programs were subsidized through state funds or YMCA ACCESS.

Rapid expansion of this sort necessitated recruiting, training, and retaining large numbers of staff, while maintaining consistently high program standards throughout the Association. To support these objectives, the Y applied for and received various foundation grants and state funds.

The Y's child care focus was not limited to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers: older children needed care after the school day came to an end. In the late 1990s, the Y assumed a key role in Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino's "Two to Six Initiative," a program that encouraged the use of school buildings for after-school care at no cost for nonprofit organizations. By 2000, the Y was operating licensed after-school child care programs in 20 Boston public schools. In addition, West Roxbury

Children at Camp Chiswick, Allston-Brighton Branch



and other branches organized programs in school buildings that were not part of the Boston Public School system.⁶

All told, the Y served more than 3,000 children per day in child care programs and 11,440 in its Summer Day Camp programs, a threefold increase since the late 1980s.⁷

Growing the Programs Through Community Collaborations

Beginning early in the decade, the YMCA increased its efforts to develop partnerships and collaborations with other organizations to expand its services and programs.

An outstanding instance of collaboration grew out of a social crisis that erupted in Egleston Square, an ethnically and culturally diverse community that sits on the border between Jamaica Plain and Roxbury. In the fall of 1990, a member of a local gang was shot and killed by two Boston police officers in a confrontation initiated by the gang. The shooting sparked community tension and occurred just two months after other members of the same gang had appeared before a Boston City Council committee meeting to ask for a youth center to provide a safe place to congregate and offer activities and programs.

A delegation of community leaders met with then President Peter Post, who without hesitation made a commitment to a new teen center. Collaborating with the Egleston Square



Egleston Square Youth Center

Neighborhood Association, the Ecumenical Social Action Council, and a community development corporation known as Urban Edge, the Y opened the center only a year after the tragedy. “This is not just another building in yet another neighborhood,” said then Mayor Ray Flynn. “This is one of the remarkable stories in Boston’s history.” Boston City Councilor Bruce Bolling remarked, “This is a celebration, but also a recognition. Even in the most adverse circumstances, positive things can be achieved.”⁸

1995

The Dorchester Branch completes extensive renovations of its facilities.



In the years that followed, YMCA branches and local community groups formed numerous active collaborations. The Dorchester Branch worked with the Codman Square Neighborhood Initiative to revitalize the neighborhood through “economic development, youth and family programs and activities, public safety and neighborhood-wide communications.”⁹

One result was the Linking Hands Center that, in addition to providing child care, trained low-income parents to be child care teachers. The Roxbury Branch and the Dudley Square Neighborhood Initiative developed programs for Hispanic youth and families. The Central Branch, in conjunction with Boston Do Something and Women’s Express, also received a three-year grant to work with youth in nearby public housing.

The Y offers many educational programs.

Programs in education and job training proved important areas of continued partnerships with city and state agencies, as well as with other nonprofit organizations. In 1993, the Y merged Training, Inc. and International Services branches to form the Education and Training Branch. After Northeastern University vacated space in the Huntington Avenue building, the newly formed unit moved down from small, cramped quarters on the third floor and established the International Learning Center (ILC) in the Hastings Wing. The Center featured two computer labs and classrooms for English as second language instruction, business communications classes, and computer literacy.¹⁰

It was not long before the Y was offering 50 ESL classes a week in seven locations, many funded by the state department of education. In 1998, the Springfield College School of Human Resources opened a Boston campus in the International Learning Center, offering both undergraduate and graduate human service degree programs through weekend classes.



During the 1990s, the Association sustained a partnership it had formed a decade earlier with Tufts Community Health Care, a state-wide health maintenance organization, to encourage Tufts members to join YMCAs throughout the Commonwealth. In 1995, the Y transferred its HMO partnership to Harvard Pilgrim Health Care. The impact of the Harvard Pilgrim relationship was significant: by 1999, 43 percent of the Association's members were affiliated with Harvard Pilgrim.

The Y established other partnerships in this period, including one with the Boston Police Department in 1995. Police officers throughout the city were asked to refer children to branches where they were given scholarships for recreational and camping programs.¹¹

Three years after the collaboration was formed, YMCA officials from across the country listened to Boston Police Commissioner Paul Evans describe the partnership as a positive step in preventing juvenile crime. "One of the biggest frustrations of an inner-city cop," said Evans, "is to look at the juvenile courts and know that unless that kid is successfully intervened upon, he's going to be in jail or dead by the time he's twenty-one. That's reality."¹² Ferrell affirmed the Y's commitment to at-risk youth: "We didn't claim to have expertise in law enforcement, but we were deeply involved with trying to prevent juvenile crime, violence and gang activity."¹³

During this period, the Central Branch assumed responsibility for a program called Elder Arts, founded by the Boston Fenway Program, a consortium of educational and cultural institutions on Huntington Avenue in which the YMCA was an active member. Elder Arts provided low-income seniors with access to arts and cultural activities by offering free or reduced price tickets.¹⁴ The Y expanded the programs to include fitness and volunteer opportunities.

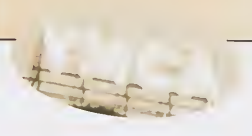
Bike Safety at the
Allston-Brighton Branch





1995

Dropping youth homicide rates make Boston a national model for crime prevention.



The Allston-Brighton Branch served as the lead organization in the development of the Gardner Extended Services School, a project that received one of three nationally awarded grants from the DeWitt Wallace–Reader’s Digest Fund. The Gardner program offered a variety of services to enhance both student learning and community enrichment, including ESL classes, parenting skills classes, counseling, and a full-time nurse and health clinic, as well as tutors and mentors for students in a comprehensive after-school program.

Preparing for a New Millennium: FOCUS2000

The economic recovery that began in the early 1990s launched one of the biggest booms in the country’s history—but one that did not lift all boats equally. Buoyed by a bull market, the rich became richer and twenty-something millionaires became commonplace—while many of the poorest did not prosper at all. In 1996, Congress passed welfare reform legislation that reduced benefits for families with dependent children. One result was an increase in the need for the job training and educational programs initiated by the Y in previous decades. The Association made the most of the improved economy to augment and expand programs and facilities with the goal of providing low-cost, high-quality support for members and program participants, particularly for families.

For the Y, the first step in these changing times was to revisit its mission and purpose—an initiative that led it to revise its

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constitution in 1996. The newly worded document rededicated the YMCA to building “spirit, mind, and body, based on the highest ideals of the Judeo-Christian heritage, and improving the quality of life for children, individuals, families and communities in the cities and towns of Greater Boston.” It was a change as momentous as it was subtle. The revision acknowledged the theological heritage of the organization in the Christian faith, but expanded its reach well beyond the limits imposed by the previous statement to embrace people of all ages, races, and backgrounds. The General Board approved the new resolve unanimously.

At the same time, the Y launched a new strategic plan, FOCUS2000. The plan included five major strategies: supporting families as the priority constituency; repositioning the Y as the preeminent community service organization in Greater Boston serving families; and expanding the program center network, ensuring that there would be a Y program center within a 10-minute ride of every family in metropolitan Boston. In addition, the Y pledged to continue to pursue partnerships, alliances, and collaborations and encourage other nearby independent associations to merge as branches; and to increase the resources available to invest in staff, programs, and facilities. FOCUS2000 provided a blueprint to double the size of the organization over the next five years.

Capital Campaigns and Capital Improvements

To make this ambitious plan possible, the General Board and staff leadership recognized that the first step was to raise funds for capital development. The phenomenal recovery of the local economy, fueled by the emergence of the Route 128 rim as the Northeast's answer to Silicon Valley, produced a positive environment for major fundraising.

In 1997, the Association announced the "Campaign for Keeping Families Strong," a three-year capital drive for renovating and building YMCAs in the greater Boston area. The \$8 million campaign, chaired by General Board member Charles R. Parrott, and supported by a new and expanded development staff, proved a great success, raising more than \$3 million beyond the original goal of \$8 million, a sum that enabled the Y to launch the most ambitious capital development plan in its 150-year history. Members of the General Board led the way with more than \$1 million in personal pledges to the campaign.

Right: Roxbury Branch Soccer rally

Below: left to right: Clint Maguire, Parks Commissioner Justine Liff, Keesler Montgomery, mascot, Louis Brothers, Boston Edison representative Tom May, Roxbury Branch Executive Director Harold Sparrow, and President John Ferrell

1998

The Walpole Active Family Center opens, providing a full range of program services to its 4,000 members.





Scenes from the Charles River Branch

Successful campaigns by the Reading and Camping branches increased the total funds raised to \$14 million by 2001. A tax-exempt bond of \$12 million added to the resources available for capital improvements. Following the success of the Y's capital campaign, the General Board elected Parrot Chairman for 2000–2001.

Several branches benefited from the campaigns. The Roxbury Branch got a new outdoor soccer field, and its building was renovated with a new addition, giving the 1960s structure a more functional and contemporary look and feel. The Reading Branch received a new 35,000 square foot facility with the Association's largest aquatic center—renamed the Burbank Branch in honor of Rita and Nelson Burbank, who contributed the lead donation of \$1.5 million. On completion of the new building, its membership more than doubled. The Charles River Branch added a new aquatic center building for its members, while the Dorchester Branch purchased a house and started a Teen Center. The Egleston Square program center moved into larger, renovated space.¹⁵

An essential component of the FOCUS2000 growth strategy was expansion through the use of leased facilities. The West Roxbury Branch had led the way with the development of the Kids' Stop child care center early in the decade. Pursuing this strategy, the Y developed a variety of innovative program centers during the mid- to late 1990s. The

Charles River Branch inaugurated an Active Family Center in leased space. The Walpole Active Family Center opened in 1998, offering program services to nearly 4,000 members. That same year, the North Suburban Branch launched a new Children's Center, with a capacity of 91 children, aged 3 months to 5 years.

Other program centers followed, including the Harborview Children's Center in the Federal Courthouse Building, created in conjunction with the General Services Administration and a parents' board, which served families working in the courthouse and surrounding areas. Launched in 1999, the East Boston Program Center became the very successful headquarters for program development in child care and day-camping. The demand for quality child care in the East Boston area proved so great that the initial slots were immediately filled on opening and the branch developed after-school care sites at five schools. Recognized for its outstanding program quality and experienced personnel, the Roxbury Branch was selected after a competitive process to manage the child care facility at Boston's new Police Headquarters.



Top: Mother and child
Above: Officer Teddy Boyle, Area A-Boston community liaison, speaks to a Wang YMCA pre-school class on kid safety. Left: A young basketball player

One of the most spectacular improvements in the Y's facilities occurred in Chinatown. For 30 years, the South Cove Y consisted of an air-inflated temporary structure that contained a tennis court-size gym, meeting rooms, and office space. Chinatown's lack of space—the most densely populated neighborhood in Boston—made it difficult to find larger quarters.

The right opportunity finally came along in 1998, when the Don Bosco High School closed. The Corcoran Jennison Co. proposed converting two of the school buildings into a hotel and a third into a new YMCA. With an enthusiastic community response, the An and Lorraine Wang Family Foundation pledged \$1 million, and Tufts University contributed \$2.1 million through a community benefit requirement for its new research building. The Y raised the



1997

Runners flock from around the world to participate in the 100th Boston Marathon.



Above: Architect's drawing of the proposed Oak Square Branch in Allston-Brighton. Inset: Groundbreaking with Y President John Ferrell, Mayor Thomas M. Menino, and students from the Thomas Gardner School

balance through a capital campaign and bond financing. The project represented a successful collaboration with the Chinatown Community Council, the Boston Redevelopment Authority, and Tufts University. In early 2000, the Wang YMCA of Chinatown welcomed the community to its new

43,000 square foot facility—critical to a neighborhood that had few affordable quality-care programs.¹⁶

In 2001, the Y of Greater Boston completed the new Oak Square Branch in Allston-Brighton on an MBTA-owned site granted by the state legislature. Supported with a lead gift of \$1 million from Liberty Mutual Insurance Company, the new complex featured universal design to provide access and programs for children and adults with disabilities. This facility was the first entirely new YMCA built in the city of Boston since the construction of the Roxbury Branch building in 1965.

The FOCUS2000 Strategic Plan stimulated significant growth in neighborhoods not previously served by the Y. By early 2001, the Association listed 75 branches, program centers, and school sites for its services and programs. It was well on the way toward achieving the goal of a Y program center within a 10-minute ride of every family in the greater Boston area.

The Y develops "Innovation and Excellence," its plan for the first five years of the new millennium.

Youth Development

To help fulfill FOCUS2000's objective of providing increased support for families, the YMCA of Greater Boston launched the Youth Development Initiative. At its inception in 1998, the initiative identified a number of key challenges: a rise in truancy and dropout rates, a gap in peer leadership, lack of encouragement for higher education, and a decline in physical education classes and sports programs in public schools.

The Youth Development Initiative gained momentum when the General Board earmarked its annual Reach Out funds as matching grants for expanding the number of branch staff positions dedicated to youth development. Newly hired staff worked with teens to involve them in leadership opportunities and service activities, teach values-based decision-making skills, enhance academic performance and commitment to learning, and promote healthy lifestyles. The core programs of Youth in Government, High Flight, Earth Services Corps, Peer Leadership, and College Path involved youth at most of the Y branches.

High Flight, the adventure-based program for at-risk youth, had its start at the North Suburban Branch in the 1980s. It illustrated the "asset" approach to youth development, helping teens build positive personal assets such as strong values and educational success. Eager to bring the program to Waltham, the National Park Service, the city of Waltham, and the Waltham YMCA joined together to fund seven sessions of the program at the branch site. U.S. Representative Joseph Kennedy attended the opening day celebration. "People have to be given time to grow," he said, "and that's what this program is about."¹⁷

The College Path program, developed by the Black Achievers Branch, represented another facet of the Y's renewed commitment to youth. Under this program, Achievers became mentors for African-American teens, assisting with the college admissions and scholarship process.



Teens in Action program participants



Keynote speaker Bill Russell and College Path students at the twenty-fifth Annual Black Achievers Recognition Awards Gala

Celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1999, the Black Achievers Branch work involved more than 60 companies annually, recognizing 80 to 100 Achievers, each of whom made a personal commitment to 40 hours of community service.

Much of the implementation for teen programming occurred in the public schools. With a grant from the Kellogg Foundation, the Y joined five other associations nationally to implement Earth Service Corps, a school-based program that fostered environmental service learning and cultural awareness for middle school teens. To assist students and educators, in 2000 the Y developed an academic support program at English High School that involved 30 teachers and staff mentoring 68 students in its first year.

Boston's low juvenile crime rate and innovative programs for youth won national attention. As in the past, the Y helped make a difference.¹⁸



Following up on the success of FOCUS2000, the General Board developed "Innovation and Excellence," a plan for the years 2001–2005. The new plan addressed five challenges:

2000

Boston celebrates the new millennium with First Night 2000, three days of festivities that rival celebrations in cities around the world.

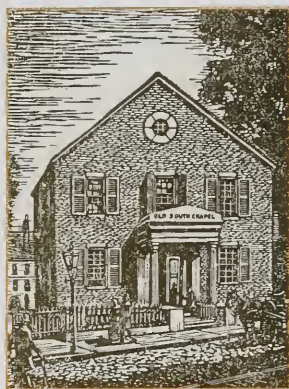


support for families as the program priority; continued efforts to position the YMCA as a premier organization serving communities throughout the metropolitan area; encouraging innovation and excellence; enlarging the YMCA's workforce; and sustaining and strengthening the Association's financial health.

At the time of its 150th anniversary and the beginning of the new millennium, the YMCA of Greater Boston had much to celebrate. The organization was stronger than it had ever been at any time in its past. It now boasted 16 branches with an operating budget of more than \$42 million. Successes in capital fundraising, positioning, and program development were notable. The work of the 1990s brought its financial resources to a new level of strength, dramatically improved its facilities, expanded geographical reach, and bolstered the Y's image as an indispensable community organization serving the neighborhoods of Greater Boston. Programs for child care, youth at risk, and senior adults—these were only a few of the many initiatives launched by the branches of the Y during this period. Between 1990 and 2000, the Association's membership grew by 78 percent, surpassing 60,000. It was prepared for a new decade with a new strategic plan.

The results could not fail to impress. The YMCA of Greater Boston was strong and healthy—and ready for whatever challenges the new millennium would bring.





Old South Chapel

Epilogue

In 1851, Thomas V. Sullivan founded the Boston Young Men's Christian Association to provide protection and guidance for young men arriving in Boston from the countryside in a period of great urban expansion and industrialization. The Y's beginnings were modest—two rental rooms above a store—but its aims were lofty. To the young man adrift in the big city, the Association provided spiritual, educational, and social programs, as well as help in locating employment opportunities and a place to live.

Fast-forward 150 years, to a different decade, century, and millennium. In 2001, the YMCA of Greater Boston is an ecumenical, community-supported organization focused on the spirit, mind, and body and delivering values education to over 100,000 men, women, boys, and girls of all ages, income levels, races, nationalities, religions, and ethnic groups. Sixty-six branches, facilities, and program centers in the greater metropolitan area and eight camps in Massachusetts and New Hampshire offer a wide array of programs in education and training, physical fitness, and child care—programs that support the Y's mission to keep families strong.

For all that has changed, so much has stayed the same. The Association's abiding sense of social responsibility continues to drive its sense of purpose as much in 2001 as it did in 1851. Now, as then, the Y is dedicated to helping people at risk from poverty, illiteracy, violence, homelessness, and unemployment. It is committed to healing barriers dividing the community, and it works closely with many communities to achieve that goal. Governed by committed volunteers and managed by staff who uphold its mission, the YMCA of Greater Boston has consistently met the challenge of relevance through anticipating the changing needs of society and adapting its services to meet those needs. That ability to focus on the present explains the Y's extraordinary development and expansion over its 150 years—and its position as one of Boston's leading social service organizations today.

As it embarks on its next 150 years, the YMCA of Greater Boston faces a new set of challenges. First is the challenge of redefining its mission and developing a deeper sense of purpose. In contrast with activities organizations, the Y works to

help people accomplish important goals that enhance their lives while it builds stronger connections with constituent groups and the community at large.

A second and related challenge concerns the development of new programs. Many of the programs launched in the past 50 years—school club programs in the 1950s, street outreach work in the 1960s, fitness in the 1970s, and child care in the 1980s—responded to the needs of the Baby Boomers making the transition from childhood to adulthood. As Baby Boomers continue to age, the Y will determine its next contribution to family development. Most likely, it will author and expand programs aimed at senior adults, and as their children grow up, the Y will develop programs for teens and young adults. Additionally, as greater Boston becomes increasingly international in population, the Y will develop employment and educational programs to help new arrivals find their way.

A third challenge—technology—is equally important. When the personal computer became an office staple, the Y became a major source of technology-based education and training to the communities it served, offering courses through its Computer Learning Centers and hands-on experience through Training, Inc. The new challenge is creative use of technology to support programs as well as training and business systems.

The YMCA of Greater Boston also views the challenge of collaboration as a top priority. Working with other organizations is a Y tradition that dates from its participation in the United States Commission during the Civil War and continues in a variety of forms today. In the years to come, the Y will deepen its relationship with other independent Ys in the Boston area for joint purchasing, marketing, use of technology, and management systems to maximize the collective strength of all.

Then there is the challenge of expansion. Throughout its history, the YMCA has been committed to this goal, upgrading old branches and opening new ones to serve the



Past YMCA presidents from left to right: Solon Cousins, John Danielson, Ray Johns, and Peter Post

ever-expanding population of Boston and its suburbs. In the new millennium, the Y will explore the possibility of launching new facilities and program centers in places such as Acton-Concord, East Boston, Hyde Park, and Medfield. The use of leased space for program centers will continue to be a viable strategy as well.

A final challenge—necessary to meet all the others—is the challenge of resources, both human and financial. While the communities of Greater Boston depend on the YMCA for high-quality programs, the YMCA of Greater Boston depends on those communities for leadership, drive, and financial support. This mutually beneficial relationship dates back to the Association's earliest days and in fact is a key reason for the organization's sustained success. New operating and capital support is critically important to future success. In the years ahead, the Y will find new ways to expand those resources—to encourage greater involvement and support from those willing to give it—while upholding its commitment to fiscal responsibility.

America's first YMCA will continue to be one of America's best in the century ahead.

Notes

CHAPTER ONE: The First Generation, 1851–1879

- 1 Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870–1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962); Alexander von Hoffman, *Local Attachments: The Making of an American Urban Neighborhood, 1850 to 1920* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1994), p. 3 and n. 4.
- 2 During one of these revivals, in the early 1840s, people prepared for the end of the world—the Millennium, it was called—which they believed to be imminent. On this period of revivalism, see Gilbert H. Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830–1844* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1933); William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, *The Web of Progress: Private Values and Public Styles in Boston and Charleston, 1828–1843* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 134; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 6–33.
- 3 The account that follows derives principally from two histories of the YMCA of Greater Boston: L. L. Doggett, *History of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association* (Boston: Young Men's Christian Association, 1901) and William B. Whiteside, *The Boston Y.M.C.A. and Community Need* (New York: Association Press, 1951). See also C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951).
- 4 *First Annual Report of the Marine Mission at Large* (Boston, 1849), p. 8; Whiteside, *The Boston Y.M.C.A. and Community Need*, pp. 15–16.
- 5 Letter quoted in its entirety in Doggett, *History of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association*, pp. 7–9.
- 6 Association Minutes, Monday Evening, 15 December 1851, Boston YMCA Standing Committee and Association Minutes, p. 1.
- 7 *Constitution and By-Laws of the YMCA* (Boston, 1852), pp. 1–2.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 In 1868, the International Committee, a new central body created by the Ys of the United States and Canada, adopted the Boston Y's membership policy.
- 10 First Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1853), p. 8.
- 11 Constitution and By-Laws of the Y.M.C.A.; Doggett, *History of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association*, pp. 12–13.
- 12 Declaration of Trust, 30 March 1852; Charles T. Russell, "An Address delivered before the Boston Young Men's Christian Association" (George C. Rand, Boston, 1852), p. 22.
- 13 Annual Report of 1851, quoted in Doggett, *History of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association*, p. 16.
- 14 Abstract of the Report of the Board of Managers, First Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1853), p. 14.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 16 The Y extended membership eligibility to women in 1937.
- 17 Sixth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1857), p. 29.
- 18 Eighth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1859), pp. 34–35.
- 19 Abstract of the Third Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1854) p. 13.
- 20 Third Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1854), p. 16.
- 21 Abstract of the Report of the Board of Managers, Third Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1854), p. 18.
- 22 Abstract of the Report of the Board of Managers, First Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1853), p. 17.
- 23 Sixth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1857), p. 32; Sixteenth Annual Report (Boston, 1867), p. 15. The East Boston Branch was the first branch of the Boston Y, but an independent YMCA, Chelsea, had already been established in the Boston area in 1860.
- 24 Eighteenth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1869), p. 13.
- 25 Sixth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1857), p. 22.

- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid., p. 23.
- 28 Eighth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1859), pp. 32–34.
- 29 Whiteside, *The Boston Y.M.C.A. and Community Need*, pp. 42–43.
- 30 For a detailed discussion of Boston in this period, see Thomas H. O'Connor, *Civil War Boston* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997).
- 31 Twelfth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1863), p. 25.
- 32 Whiteside, *The Boston Y.M.C.A. and Community Need*, p. 46.
- 33 Edmund T. Easton, "Report on the Library Rooms," Twelfth Annual Report (Boston, 1863), p. 19.
- 34 Speech given at the final session of U.S. Christian Commission in the House of Representatives on 11 February 1866. Quote provided by Doggett, *History of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association*, pp. 34–35.
- 35 Twelfth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1863), p. 24; Fourteenth Annual Report (Boston, 1865), p. 21.
- 36 L. P. Rowland, Jr., Letter to his brother, 25 November 1881.
- 37 *The Soldier's Hymn-Book, With Tunes*, Young Men's Christian Association (New York: The Press of the American Tract Society, New York, n.d.), p. 1.
- 38 "Levi P. Rowland, Lisbon, Connecticut, Dec. 24th, 1837...Detroit, Michigan, Dec. 24, 1929," p. 1.
- 39 Fourteenth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1865), p. 19.
- 40 Doggett, *History of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association*, p. 31.
- 41 Sixteenth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1867), pp. 30–31; Twenty-Second Annual Report (Boston, 1873) pp. 43–45.
- 42 Eighteenth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1869), p. 32.
- 43 Nineteenth Annual Report (Boston, 1869), pp. 10–11.
- 44 Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, pp. 245–47.
- 45 Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1873), p. 18.
- 46 Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1874), p. 64.
- 47 B.Y.M.C.A. Bazaar of the Nations Reports and Acknowledgements (Boston, 1874).
- 48 McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 1982), p. 586.
- 49 Fortunately, the Chicago YMCA came to the rescue—grateful for the help the Boston Y had provided after their own Great Fire a year earlier—as did a few generous individuals. (Twenty-First Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association, p. 81–83; Twenty-Second Annual Report (Boston, 1873), pp. 37–41.)
- 50 Twenty-Eighth BYMCA Annual Report (1879), pp. 14–15.
- 51 Twenty-Ninth Annual Report, 1880, p. 20; Whiteside, *The Boston Y.M.C.A. and Community Need*, pp. 76–78.
- 52 Robert J. Roberts, "The Weak Made Strong," *The Young Men's Magazine*, 1893, pp. 14–15.
- 53 Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1887), p. 17.
- 54 Twenty-Fourth Annual Report (Boston, 1875), pp. 37–39; for the Evening Institute, see Chapter 2.
- 55 Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1876), p. 9.

CHAPTER TWO: Broadening the Focus, 1880–1913

- 1 Rev. W. N. Brodbeck, Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1887), p. 58.
- 2 See Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Rise of the City, 1878–1898* (New York: Macmillan, 1933); Samuel Hays, *The Response to Industrialism, 1885–1914*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- 3 Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs*, p. 22; Thomas H. O'Connor, *Bibles, Brahmins, and Bosses: A Short History of Boston*, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1984), pp. 106–109.

- 4 Annual Report for the year ending December 31st, 1911, Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1912), p. 39.
- 5 Thirty-First Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (1882), p. 16.
- 6 Walter Muir Whitehill and Lawrence W. Kennedy, *Boston: A Topographical History*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, Mass./London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 175; Thirty-First Annual Report, pp. 16–17.
- 7 Thirty-First Annual Report, p. 21.
- 8 On the significance of YMCA architecture, see Paula Lupkin, "Manhood Factories: Architecture, Business, and the Evolving Urban Role of the YMCA," in Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt, eds., *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City* (New York/London: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 40–64.
- 9 Alfred S. Woodworth, "Address of President Woodworth," Annual Report 1887, p. 51.
- 10 Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1883), p. 52; 38th Annual Report (Boston, 1889), pp. 58–59; Annual Report of 1911 (Boston, 1912), p. 39.
- 11 Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1889), pp. 12–13.
- 12 Boston Young Men's Christian Association, "Building a Career" (Boston, undated), p. 1.
- 13 Thirty-Seventh Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1888), pp. 73–76.
- 14 Thirty-First Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1882), pp. 34–35. The French Branch would follow, becoming a branch of the Boston Y in 1907. Although its membership remained low, Y officials believed it was critical to keep the door open to those who did not speak English.
- 15 Thirty-Sixth Annual Report (Boston, 1887), p. 44.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- 17 C. P. Shedd, *Two Centuries of Student Christian Movements* (New York: Association Press, 1934), pp. 126–144; Thirty-Seventh Annual Report (1888), pp. 19–20, 48–51; *Leisure Hours*, January 1888, February 1888; Forty-Fifth Annual Report, Boston Young Men's Christian Association (1896), pp. 53–62; Whiteside, *The Boston Y.M.C.A.*, p. 133. During World War I, the college branches would be consolidated into the Intercollegiate Branch, which lasted until the early 1920s.
- 18 Whiteside, *The Boston Y.M.C.A.*, pp. 129–131.
- 19 After the outbreak of World War I, the Army and Navy branches were consolidated into the Army-Navy YMCA, and made an independent Association, based at City Square, Charlestown.
- 20 The Boston Young Men's Christian Association Annual Report, Jubilee Year (Boston, 6 December, 1901), pp. 96–104. See Thomas Winter, "Contested Spaces: The YMCA and Workingmen on the Railroads, 1877–1917," in Mjagkij and Spratt, eds. *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*.
- 21 Annual Report 1913–1914, p. 11.
- 22 See Chapter 6.
- 23 Thirty-First Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1882), p. 18; Thirty-Seventh Annual Report (Boston, 1888), p. 27.
- 24 Twenty-Eighth Annual Report (Boston, 1879), p. 16.
- 25 L. H. Gulick, "The Distinctive Features of the Physical Work in the Association," 1891, quoted in Hopkins, *The History of the Y.M.C.A.*, p. 255.
- 26 Walter Jones, "The Sands of Time, Sandy Island Camp: The First 50 Years, 1898–1949," in *The Sands of Time—Sandy Island Camp: The First 100 Years, 1899–1998* (Chelsea, Mass., 1998), pp. 4–5, 12.
- 27 Everett C. Marston, *Origin and Development of Northeastern University, 1898–1960* (Boston, 1961), pp. 7–8.
- 28 Frank Palmer Speare, "Boston's Young Men," 18 September 1896, pp. 1–2; Forty-Sixth Annual Report (Boston, 1897), pp. 20–22.
- 29 Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association (Boston, 1901), pp. 51–55; Whiteside, *The Boston Y.M.C.A.*, pp. 115–116; Marston, *Origin and Development of Northeastern University*, pp. 9–13. For the second half of the story—the evolution of the Association Institute into Northeastern College and then Northeastern University—see Chapter 3.

- 30 Speare, Postcard, 22 January 1912.
- 31 Evening Institute Automobile School Catalogue of 1912–1913, pp. 13–24.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 7–8.
- 33 *Association Institute Bulletin: Day Schools 1911–12*, vol. 3, no. 2 (April 15, 1912), p. 63.
- 34 Ibid. On the founding of the different schools, see Marston, *Origin and Development of Northeastern University*, pp. 14–30.
- 35 Huntington School for Boys Catalogue, 1916–1917.
- 36 Whitehill and Kennedy, *Boston: A Topographical History*, pp. 184–88.
- 37 President William Howard Taft, Speech, 2 October 1912. The original speech is preserved in the YMCA of Greater Boston Archives, located at Northeastern University.
- 38 Annual Report of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association for the Year Ending December 31, 1910 (Boston, 1911), p. 4.
- 39 On the boys' organizations formed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see David I. Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners, 1870–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).
- 40 Boys' Division Fall Announcement, 1913, pp. 5, 7, 8, 11, and 15.
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Acknowledgments

Julia Heskel is a history partner at The Winthrop Group, Inc., a Cambridge-based consulting firm specializing in the research and production of corporate and not-for-profit histories and case studies. The author of *The North Aegean Wars, 371–360 B.C.* (Franz Steiner, 1997) and *Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott, Past to Present* (private printing, 1999), she is currently completing a history of Phillips Exeter Academy.

Many people helped make this book a reality. I begin by thanking the present and former members of the General Board of the YMCA of Greater Boston, who provided the financial assistance to make production possible. I wish also to thank former Y Presidents John Danielson and Peter B. Post, who agreed to multiple interviews and provided documents and photographs vital to the book.

The following gave generously of their time for oral history interviews: Julian T. Anthony, Elsa Bengal, Robert D. Brace, Louis Brothers, Donald Call, John E. Danielson, John M. Ferrell, Ionela Istrate, Cathy Kelly, William B. Marsh, Neil Nichol, Peter B. Post, Robert Spencer, Donna Sullivan, Bruce Taylor, and Stanley Walters.

I am particularly grateful to YMCA of Greater Boston President John M. Ferrell, who supported the project enthusiastically from beginning to end. He committed much time for interviews and reading drafts, and provided invaluable insight into the workings of the Y. Kelley Rice, Vice President for External Affairs, devoted a tremendous amount of energy to the project, reviewing drafts, facilitating interviews, and generally helping out.

Joan D. Krizack, University Archivist and Head of the Special Collections Department at Northeastern University, provided access to the collection of YMCA materials housed in Northeastern's Snell Library. She and her assistants cheerfully and tirelessly located and photocopied documents from the collection. My debt to them is great indeed.

Lance Wickens gave the manuscript a close copy-editing and reviewed the final page proofs.

At The Winthrop Group, Inc. Elizabeth Wilson conducted research and interviews and wrote preliminary drafts of Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

This book was designed by Christine Reynolds of Reynolds Design & Management in Waltham, Massachusetts. In addition to her excellent design work, Chris chased down numerous key photographs and contributed many helpful comments about the book's content. Suzanne Spellman of TextEffects provided meticulous transcripts of the oral history interviews. Kathy Massimini compiled the index.

Credits: All photographs and art are from The YMCA of Greater Boston (M13) University Libraries Archives and Special Collections Department, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, except for the following: courtesy of the Charles River Branch, photographer J. D. Sloan: ii (left), v (left), 115 (top), 122; courtesy of the Central Branch: ii (right), 108 (left), 109 (right), 119, 124 (top), photographer William Mercer: ii (center), iii (left, center), iv (all), v (center), viii (right), ix (right), 109 (left), 116, 117, 120, 123 (top and bottom), Barry's Photography: 90 (left), 92, photographer Lucy Chen: 113, David R. Barnes Photography Ltd.: 127, photographer Rob Macintosh Communications: 129; courtesy of the Camping Services Branch: v (right), Diane Broadley Photography: iii (right); *History of the Boston Young Men's Christian Association, 1851–1901*, by L. L. Doggett, 1901: i–v (background), vii (left), viii (right), 5, 18, 20 (bottom); courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Print Department: 15 (bottom); courtesy of The Bostonian Society/Old State House: 22; courtesy of the YMCA of the USA Archives, Kautz Family YMCA Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries: 70 (left and right), 72, 80; courtesy of the Waltham Branch: 114; courtesy of the Roxbury Branch: 121; courtesy of the Wang YMCA of Chinatown: 123; courtesy of the Allston-Brighton Branch: vii (right), 108 (right), 115 (bottom), 118, 124, 125; courtesy of the Black Achievers Branch: 126.

Colophon: Printer: The Stinehour Press, Lunenburg, Vermont; Binding: Acme Bookbinding, Charlestown, Massachusetts; Design/Production: Reynolds Design & Management, Waltham, Massachusetts. Typefaces: Janson Text and Gill Sans; Paper: Cougar Opaque White Smooth Text.

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